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STORIES BY

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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Our office frequently receives queries from potential writers asking how one goes about submitting stories to the magazine. Perhaps it's time to comment on that again in this space—it's been about two years since the last time we did so.

As a matter of fact, it's quite simple. *Writing* a good story is a pretty tricky item; submitting it once it's on paper is a breeze. Here's how it's done:

All manuscripts should be typed, of course. One side of the paper only; double-spaced (not space-and-a-half). The pages should be paper clipped together, and to them should be attached a self-addressed, stamped manila envelope for the manuscript's return in case we can't use the story. Please don't staple the manuscript to-

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Persons who live outside the United States should enclose International Reply Coupons, available from their post office, in place of stamps on the return envelope.

And that's all there is to it. By the grace of the United States Postal Service, we *will* receive the manuscript; we *will* give it full consideration; we might buy it.

So all you need now, we trust, is that good story we were mentioning above!

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FICTION

The Bones in the Well



by Stephanie Kay Bendel

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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It was the second Monday in September, and I was looking forward to a nice quiet stretch before hunting season began. The summer tourists had all gone home, the local kids were safely in school—most of them, anyhow—and my daily workload as county sheriff had dropped to a pleasant level. I'd even given my deputy the week off. Calla, the woman who acts as my secretary/receptionist/answering service, had stepped out for an early lunch. Leaning back in my chair, I propped my feet on my desk and sipped my coffee as I stared at the orange leaves of the oak tree outside my window. Northern Wisconsin in September is about as pretty as any place gets.

My view of the scenery was suddenly interrupted by Rusty Running Thunder's old blue pickup. It lurched to a stop in front of my office window and Rusty himself clambered out with an air of urgency that told me I had trouble.

He pushed open my office door and, without bothering to greet me, said, "How many names do you have on your missing persons list, Howard?"

I thought a moment. "'Bout twenty, I s'pose. If you go way back. Why?"

"Just found one of 'em."

He paused for my reaction,

and I tried to gauge by his expression the extent of my problem. It was a useless exercise. Rusty's face almost never revealed his thoughts. I guess that was because he tried not to think too much. He'd been a POW in 'Nam for nearly five years, and there were plenty of things connected with that time that he'd have liked to forget—and couldn't. The experience aged him. He was barely forty, but anyone looking at him would have thought him at least twenty years older. His hair was totally white and his coppery skin had weathered and wrinkled into hard lines. He was still an impressive-looking man, though. Standing six foot four, he carried two hundred twenty pounds of hard muscle. His large eagle-beak nose gave him a quiet dignity that was heightened by the intelligence apparent in his dark eyes.

"Where did you find him—or her?" I asked.

"At the bottom of the old well on that property I own on Little Deer Lake."

I looked up. "What'd the body look like?"

He shrugged. "It's just bones. Human, though. I could tell that much. I'd say they've been there a long time. Better come and take a look."

I nodded and reached for the

phone to call Doc Brandner, our local coroner. As Rusty and I waited for Doc, I dug through the files of missing persons. There were fewer than I'd thought. A dozen kids over a period of twenty years, all of them with a history of running away—a couple of alcoholics who'd lived by bumming meals, stealing booze, and sleeping in alleyways in the summer and shanties in the winter—and a summer person, one Dr. Michael Crenshaw, a Chicago psychiatrist, no less.

I remembered the case—not that it had ever been much of one. Crenshaw had spent the summer here in Kashawaka County—it must have been about ten years ago—I was still a deputy then. He'd been writing a book. Then, at the end of the summer, he'd packed up and driven away—and never arrived in Chicago. His sister came up from Illinois and raised holy hell. She was sure something terrible had happened to him.

Everyone up here was also sure something had happened to him, but we didn't think it was necessarily fatal. It seemed that another person had disappeared at the same time—Cynthia Keene, the very attractive wife of a Minnesota businessman who owned a big

summer place up here. It turned out that Mrs. Keene and Dr. Crenshaw had spent a great deal of time together in the two months before they disappeared.

At his sister's request, Crenshaw was officially listed as a missing person. Cynthia Keene, however, was not. Her husband refused to file a report.

"She was never anything but a tramp," I remembered him saying bitterly. "I don't know why anyone's surprised at this—I'm not."

Alex Keene locked up his big place then, and took off. He still came back a few times a year, arriving in his private seaplane, landing right on Little Deer Lake. He didn't mix with the local people when he came. He just hung around his summer place, doing some fishing or hunting, depending on the season.

There had been a routine search for Crenshaw. Since his car had disappeared, the highway patrol was alerted to watch for it. The hospitals and morgues throughout the state were contacted. We even searched some of the more likely wooded areas around here, but it would have been impossible to search all of them. Northern Wisconsin is mostly forests and lakes.

Finally, we just gave up. The

case was still open. Local wisdom had it that Crenshaw and Cynthia Keene had chucked everything and taken off for Tahiti—or Pago Pago.

I looked at Rusty. "Are you sure there's only one set of bones down there?"

He nodded. "Some of the bones are broken, but there's only one skull for sure. You thinking of the Keene woman? That she didn't run away with that doctor?"

"I always thought it was funny that Dr. Crenshaw never let his sister know he was all right even if he did decide to abandon his fancy practice and his fat stock portfolio and his luxury condo on Lake Michigan. How far is the well from the Keenes' summer place, Rusty?"

He thought for a moment. "Only a few hundred yards, I'd guess. My property abuts the Keene place."

Doc Brandner walked into the office then. "What's this about bones in wells?" he snorted. "Think I ain't got enough work around here?"

Running Thunder filled him in.

"What the hell were you doing down in a well?" Doc asked as the three of us climbed into my cruiser. "And what's a well doing in the middle of the woods?"

Rusty gave him one of his im-

penetrable looks. "It isn't doing anything, Doc. Just hiding a body."

Doc snorted. "You know what I mean."

"There used to be a cottage on that property. The place burned down years ago, and the owners never rebuilt it. When the dam was built upriver, the water table dropped and the well went dry, so the land went on the market at a pretty reasonable price about the time I got back from 'Nam with all my veteran's comp. I figured I'd invest in some land."

"I didn't ask for your whole life history," Doc grumbled. "What were you doin' down the well?"

"I'm comin' to that," Rusty said patiently. "I plan to build a house on that lot. I figure I can use the old foundation. I have to drill the well deeper, but it's less expensive than drilling a new one. So I climbed down to clean out the debris before the drilling rig came—and I found bones."

I pulled the cruiser into the dirt driveway that led into Running Thunder's lot. It was a pretty spot, heavily treed, up on a hill overlooking the lake. The foundation of the old house was off to the right, set in a clump of birch trees whose leaves had turned a brilliant yellow. As we

climbed out of the cruiser, a shadow detached itself from the trees and a dark figure scuttled off into the brush.

I turned to Running Thunder. "Who's that?"

He squinted. "I'd guess it's Mary Bear. She hangs around here sometimes. Stole my lunch the other day." He chuckled. "Bet she didn't count on getting bean sprouts and yogurt."

Mary Bear is the only known woman in the "wood population" of Kashawaka County. Big cities have their street people and bag ladies. We've got the "wood population." No one knows how many of them there are, but estimates vary from fifty to a couple of hundred in the county. Mostly dropouts from society, drugged-up kids with nowhere to go, runaways, drunks, or former mental patients, they hole up in the woods during the summer and break into cottages in the winter. Usually they do little harm—they steal a few cans of soup or beans or a warm blanket and maybe bring some lice into the place.

No one knows who Mary Bear is or where she came from. She got her name from Wally Gotchalk, who surprised her trying to jimmy a window at his place a few years ago.

"She growled at me! Growled

just like a wild animal—like a bear. Smelled like one, too, don'cha know?" Wally had grumbled. "Well, I just backed off and let her be. I ain't tangling with no bear woman!"

No one blamed him. Mary was as tall as he, and with her long gray hair in wild tangles and her dark piercing eyes, she was a formidable sight—and had a formidable odor as well.

Rusty, Doc, and I headed over to the well. The small circular stone wall of the well was only about two and a half feet high. Several weathered boards had been laid across the top. Rusty drew them back, and Doc and I leaned over and peered down the darkness. I had brought along a powerful searchlamp, and I directed the beam downward. Sure enough, about thirty feet below, a human skull stared back at us from a nest of bones.

"I've got a rope ladder here," Rusty said, "if either of you wants to go down. There isn't room for more than one at a time."

Doc gave me a tired grimace. "Guess I'm elected, huh?"

I shrugged. "You can tell a lot more from looking at bones than I can, Doc."

Fifteen minutes later, a weary Doc climbed out and sighed. "Better call the state police, Howard. Whoever it is—was

—down there was murdered. The back of the skull is bashed in. I'd guess it's an axe or a hatchet job."

In Wisconsin, the state police do much of the forensic work in cases involving murders that take place outside the limits of the bigger cities. Smaller communities just don't have the manpower or facilities to handle a lot of complicated scientific tests. I walked back to the cruiser and got the state police on the radio. They said they'd send someone out. Rusty agreed to stand watch in the meanwhile and hitch a ride back to town later to pick up his truck.

I drove Doc back to his office. "Was there anything else you could tell from the bones—anything I ought to know?" I asked.

He gave his grizzled head a little shake. "Wasn't a kid. That much I can say. Bones had stopped growing."

"Male or female?"

"Couldn't tell. The pelvis had been broken, probably when the body was thrown down there. It'll have to be reconstructed. Some of the experts can tell the sex by the facial structure, but I don't have any experience in that sort of thing. I'd be guessing."

"How long do you think it'll take the state boys to get some

information to us?" I asked.

Doc smiled. "Howard, this isn't exactly an emergency. I don't suppose they're going to rush."

Back in my own office, I pulled the file on the Crenshaw case. Dr. Michael Crenshaw had been thirty-one years old when he disappeared. The description in the report was brief: Caucasian male, five feet ten, a hundred and sixty pounds, light brown hair, blue eyes, no distinguishing marks.

Since Cynthia Keene was not officially missing, I had no information on her, but I knew where to get some.

Lana Laughing Waters was a twenty-six-year-old genuine Indian princess, descended from a long line of chieftains, the last of whom was her father, Charley One Feather. The title, though, was all that Lana could claim. Her life was hardly royal. She spent six days a week slinging hash at Ed's diner on Highway 47. When she wasn't working there, she was generally taking care of Charley, who had a problem with the bottle.

I found Lana behind the lunch counter, filling salt shakers. Her black hair was drawn into twin braids that fell to her shoulders and gleamed against the pink polyester of her uni-

form. She smiled at me, her soft brown eyes twinkling. "The usual, Howard? Chili with cheese and onions, black coffee, and a doughnut?"

I shook my head. "Livin' it up today. Bring me a steak and smother it with mushrooms. And when you get a chance, c'mon over to my table. I have to talk to you."

I was pushing the last mushroom around my plate when Lana finally came over with a pot of coffee and an extra cup. She warmed my drink, poured herself a cup, and sat down.

The ceiling lights played on those high Indian cheekbones, and for a moment I imagined what this woman might have looked like had not white men taken over her land. I saw her in a fringed deerskin dress with colored feathers in her hair, lying on a buffalo robe, a handsome young brave at her side.

Then I blinked and saw her waitress's uniform and the little tired lines around her eyes.

"What can I do for you, Howard?" she asked.

"You worked for the Keenes one summer, didn't you?"

She nodded. "Yeah. As a kind of maid-housekeeper. The summer Mrs. Keene took off with the doctor." She grinned. "Some people were surprised, but I wasn't. She had the hots for

him. I was only sixteen at the time, and living there that summer was a real education, you know?" She grinned again.

"Tell me about it."

She thought for a moment. "To tell the truth, I felt sorry for Mrs. Keene. I mean, she was twice as old as I was, but it seemed as though it was the other way around—that she was the child and I had to take care of her."

I frowned. "How do you mean?"

"She seemed so—helpless. And lonely. Mr. Keene is not exactly a warm person." She grimaced. "He flew up on the weekends, usually on Saturday afternoon. He always left after lunch on Sunday. She begged him to stay longer, but he said he was too busy, that he couldn't take the time."

"How did they get along?"

She frowned. "I never heard them fight, but he always talked to her as if she were a child. 'Now, Cynthia, you know I can't stay. I have work to do.' 'Now, Cynthia, you know we can't possibly go dancing tonight.'"

"So why didn't she go back to Minnesota? Why would she spend a whole summer alone in the woods if she wasn't happy there?"

"It wasn't exactly the woods," Lana said, looking at me. "Have

you seen their place? It's more like a palace in the woods."

"You know what I mean. No one to visit, her husband not around. Not that I'm disparaging your company, but it seems like a pretty lonely way for a woman to spend the summer."

Lana frowned. "I gathered—nobody said it, exactly—that she'd been sick—real sick. She had several bottles of pills by her bedtable. And there was a private nurse at the beginning of the summer, but Mrs. Keene fired her. Said she was too nosy. I don't know anything more about that. But Mr. Keene did tell me when I was hired that Mrs. Keene was supposed to have a lot of rest and quiet. That was why she was there."

Lana paused. "I don't think she was very happy—until she met Dr. Crenshaw."

"How'd that happen?"

"She was out walking one afternoon and so was he. I remember she came home with her cheeks all pink and her eyes sparkling. She said she was going to have a guest for dinner that evening, and did I know how to cook something elegant?"

"And Crenshaw came to dinner?"

Laughing Waters nodded. "And stayed until after ten. The two of them would be talking

a blue streak whenever I walked into the room. Then they'd stop and wait for me to leave. After that first evening, he was over there almost every day. Sometimes they played music and danced half the night. And Mrs. Keene never again spoke about how her husband wasn't around or how much she wanted to go back to Minnesota. She was like a teenager. You know, talking too much, giggling, sometimes crying, making a fuss over every little thing."

"Think they were having an affair?"

"I know it."

"How?"

She leered at me. "Maids always know. Remember, they make the beds and do the laundry."

"So what do you think happened?"

"They ran off together. What else? The night before they disappeared, the doctor came over for dinner. Afterward, he and Mrs. Keene sat out on the porch and talked for a long time. When he left, she was in tears. But the next morning, she was happy and giggling again. She sent me into town in the jeep to pick up some groceries, and when I got back, she was gone. I figure the night before, the doctor had asked her to go away with him, and she was afraid

to. That's why she was crying. But during the night, she must have changed her mind. That's why she was so happy the next morning. It fits."

I considered. "If I remember correctly, none of her things were gone, though. If you were running away, wouldn't you take some clothes and jewelry?"

"I would, sure. But Mrs. Keene wouldn't have. She was like a little girl in a lot of ways. Never planned anything more than a couple of hours in advance. She was used to having someone else take care of her. Besides," Laughing Waters said, grinning mischievously, "maybe where they were going, they didn't need a lot of clothes."

"Ah! The Tahiti theory!"

But even in Tahiti, they'd have needed some money. And the doctor's credit cards hadn't been used after that fateful day, nor had his bank accounts been touched. He might have sold his car, true. It had been a Porsche convertible, if I remembered correctly. But again, even that wouldn't have produced enough money for two people to live on for long. Of course, he was an intelligent man. He might have found a way to earn a living under an assumed name.

But why leave all that money behind when there was no reason to do so?

When I got back to the office,

Running Thunder was waiting for me. "The state police have taken all the bones to Madison," he said. "They've taken pictures of every square inch of the well and picked up every cigarette butt and piece of paper on the lot. Think I can go ahead with the drilling?"

I said I'd call the state police and see whether I could clear it for him. "Sit down, Rusty. I want to talk."

He grabbed a wooden chair and straddled it, resting his arms on the back. "What's up?"

"Did you ever meet either of the Keenes?"

He nodded. "Alex Keene. That was after his wife disappeared, though. I never met her."

"What do you think of him?"

Running Thunder shrugged. "Cold fish. The kind of man who never speaks two words if he can answer you in one. Fair man, though. When I bought my property, there was some question about the boundary line. He could have given me a hard time, but he was accommodating. He worked things out pretty easily."

"Think he was being friendly?"

Rusty shook his head. "Nope. I think it was just such a small matter to him, he didn't want it to take any more of his time. Hurry up and get it over with. That's what his attitude was."

I was silent for a moment. Then Rusty said, "Which one of them do you think it is? In the well, I mean."

I toyed with a pencil on my desk. "Well, the most logical solution demands two bodies, not one. If Alex happened to make an unexpected stop at his summer place and he found his wife in a compromising position with the doctor, I could see him bashing someone's head in. And Alex Keene could have flown in and out without anyone's being aware that he'd done so."

"But we have only one body," Rusty reminded me.

"That doesn't mean there isn't another somewhere," I count-

ered. "We have one body and one missing person."

"True. But you have to consider the possibility that the missing person is alive."

"In which case, the missing person is the most likely suspect. Otherwise, why stay in hiding all these years?"

"Think Crenshaw might have killed her?"

"Could have," I said. "A summer fling with someone else's wife. It's over for him, but not for her. She wants to continue, he doesn't. They quarrel. He hits her—" I stopped. "Doc said he thought it was done with an axe or a hatchet. That part doesn't seem to fit."

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"It might," Rusty said easily. "Around here, everybody's got an axe. They might have been outside when they quarreled. If there was an axe on the woodpile, who knows?"

We sat staring at each other for a moment, then Rusty said, "Could it have been the other way around? She killed him?"

I considered. "Then she would have to have taken his car. And she still didn't have any money. Where would she go? According to Laughing Waters, the woman was childlike. How could she support herself?"

Rusty looked at me. "Then there should be another body around here somewhere."

His broad copper face was impassive. He was right, of course. We'd have to search.

"Think you can help me round up some men?" I asked.

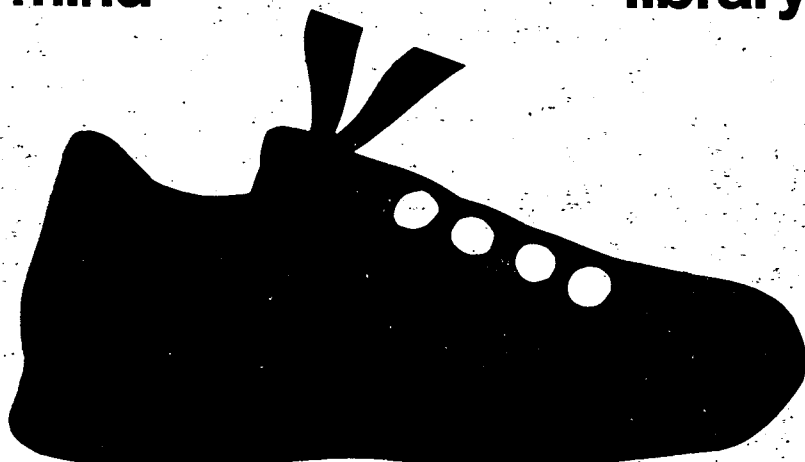
He shrugged and nodded. "Guess my house can wait a few more days."

"What made you decide to build a house just now, anyway?" I wondered out loud.

He actually smiled—a rare thing. "Maybe I don't want to spend the rest of my life in a couple of rooms above the drugstore. Maybe I need a change. Or—" His voice dropped to little more than a whisper. "Maybe I'm thinking of getting married."

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I straightened up in surprise. "You're putting me on!" I exclaimed. Then I felt a sense of shame. I kept forgetting that Rusty was not an old man—white hair and wrinkles notwithstanding. There was no reason why he shouldn't get married.

I tried to cover my embarrassment. "Who's the lucky woman?"

His normal impassiveness returned. "I'll tell you when she accepts my proposal."

"You mean you haven't asked her yet?"

He shrugged again. "I figure she'll be more inclined to say yes if there's a nice new house in the picture."

I winced inwardly at his words. Of all the men I knew, Running Thunder was the one I'd most like at my side if I were in trouble. He was the most honest man I knew, and he was one of the few people in the world whose opinions I valued. I always figured he'd never married because the idea of being tied down just didn't appeal to him. It had never occurred to me that he might be afraid of being rejected.

The sheriff's budget for Kashawaka County was not very big. It certainly wasn't big enough to pay

men to search hundreds of thousands of acres of woods. The best I could do was to call for volunteers and ask the local population to search any likely areas on their properties. That left about a million places in the county where a body could have been hidden, but I did what I could.

About fifty men and two hundred teenagers (who thought the search was a wonderful excuse to skip some school) showed up the next couple of days and we fanned out from the Keene place, poking and prodding the underbrush. We saw a few signs of wood people—crude shelters constructed of branches and blankets; the remains of an occasional fire, empty cans from beans or soup or beer. But we found no sign of a body.

Enthusiasm dropped off pretty quickly, and by Thursday afternoon, I had no more than a dozen men willing to spend more time searching. Even Rusty told me he'd have to take a bye on Friday morning. He had an engineer coming out to make sure the old foundation was sound before construction began on the house.

The state police had ordered Rusty to hold off drilling on his well, but other than that, we had heard nothing from them. I was getting discouraged, and

just before dark I left the area I had been combing and headed back to Running Thunder's place. I figured I'd have a first-hand look at the bottom of that well myself. Maybe there was something that Doc and the state detectives had missed.

Rusty had left the rope ladder near the foundation of the old house, and I tied one end securely to a pine tree and lowered myself down. I'd brought my searchlight and focused it on the rocky bottom of the well. I poked through the stones and sticks and dried leaves and found exactly nothing. If there had been any good evidence, the state boys had found it.

I shone my light up the walls of the well. It was a typical old fashioned affair, built of stones garnered from the area and cemented together with mortar. There was a little moss on some of the stones, but otherwise everything looked unremarkable.

Suddenly something struck me on the head. It wasn't hard enough to stun me, but it did startle me. I turned to find the rope ladder on the ground beside my feet.

It hadn't come undone by itself. I had tied two solid square knots into the piece of rope I'd wrapped around the pine.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Hey! I'm down here! Get me out!" I shone

the beam of my searchlight upward and saw that someone was sliding the old boards back across the top of the well.

"Hey!"

There was no reply, of course. I was madder than hell, but I wasn't really afraid. At worst, Rusty would be out with the engineer to look at the foundation in the morning, so there was no chance I was going to end up being the next set of bones in the well. But I was going to be mighty uncomfortable in the meanwhile.

The day had been warm, so I was lightly dressed, and now the sun was setting and the outdoor temperature would quickly drop below freezing. I'd have a little more warmth at the bottom of the well, but it probably wouldn't be more than forty or forty-five degrees for the next several hours. I huddled down against the wall, grateful for the fact that at least I had the searchlight, and tried to get comfortable. It was impossible. The rocks were too sharp for me to sit down—not that there was enough room to stretch my legs out anyhow. A few minutes later, in the distance, I heard a car start up and drive away. I remember thinking that it was odd that I hadn't heard it arrive. I spent a long, cold, uncomfortable night in a semi-squatting position.

About eight o'clock the following morning, I heard Rusty's pickup and started yelling. The boards overhead slid away, and a little sunlight filtered down to me. I saw Rusty, an amazed expression on his face, peering over the top of the well.

"What in tarnation?" he exclaimed.

"Get me out of here!" I holered. "I'm half frozen."

He found some fishing line in his truck and used it to pull up the rope ladder. It seemed forever before I climbed out and into the sunlight. Every muscle in my body felt stiff. Rusty pulled an old army blanket out of his truck and wrapped it around me.

"I'll take you into town," he said. "Maybe we should have Doc check you out."

I shook my head. "Thanks, but I can drive in myself."

"In what?"

"In the crui—" I looked around and saw that the cruiser was gone. I had heard my own car drive off the night before.

"Who in hell would steal a police car?" I wondered out loud. "And why?"

Back in my office, Doc Brandner finished poking me and pronounced me cold but healthy. He fished in the bottom drawer of my filing cabinet where he knew

I kept a small bottle of rye.

Pouring a little into a paper cup, he said, "This isn't exactly what I recommend for breakfast, but it'll do you good."

Rusty came in with a basin of warm water, which he set on the floor at my feet. Then he proceeded to pull off my boots and socks. "Get the feet warm and you'll feel better fast," he said. He stood up. "I have to go now. The engineer's probably wondering what happened to me." He got as far as the door and turned. "Oh, by the way, Howard, I thought you'd be interested to know that Alex Keene is supposed to arrive in his seaplane around noon."

I was interested. I had planned to call Keene and have him come to Wisconsin for questioning as soon as I had gotten a little more information. But as long as he was coming today, I might as well find out what I could from him right now.

Ten minutes of sitting still was about all I could bear. I had Calla put out an APB on the cruiser, figuring it shouldn't take long to find a police car. Then Doc gave me a ride home to pick up my old Dodge, which had to serve as transportation for the time being. Unfortunately, I'd be without a police radio.

At a quarter of twelve, I was standing out in front of the

Keene summer place. Laughing Waters hadn't been kidding. The house, built of logs and fieldstone, was enormous—at least sixteen or eighteen rooms, I estimated. There was a three-car garage—I peeked through one of the windows and saw a jeep, a pickup, and a small station wagon. In addition, there was a boathouse, a toolshed, and an enormous industrial-size metal dock that extended some sixty or seventy feet out into the lake. Knowing that Keene spent only a couple of weeks here each year, I wondered what his permanent home was like.

Within minutes, a small red and white Cessna with pontoons flew into view. It circled overhead and came down as if to land, but at the last moment, it pulled up sharply and banked off to the right. I wondered whether Keene was running away because he'd seen me waiting for him.

But no. The little plane spiraled down and landed on the water some hundred yards to the left of the pier. Slowly, it taxied across the water and pulled up to one side of the dock. The pilot's door opened and Alex Keene put a sunburned arm out and expertly tossed a loop of rope around one of the dock posts. A moment

later, he stood beside me. A tall rawboned man in his early fifties, he had a thick head of slightly grizzled hair, small gray eyes, and a long thin nose.

"Afternoon, sheriff."

I nodded. "I'd like to talk to you. Can we go inside and sit down?"

"Is it important? I don't have much time."

"It has to do with your wife's disappearance."

He looked at me sharply. "Have you found her?"

It wasn't the best time or place to explain to the man that maybe his wife's bones had turned up, but I had to tell him. He took the news calmly.

"We haven't identified the bones yet, but I'm pretty sure they belong to either Mrs. Keene or Dr. Crenshaw."

He seemed puzzled. "I was certain they were together. They both disappeared at the same time, so I figured . . ." His voice trailed off.

Keene unlocked the house and we entered a blue and white kitchen. The place was huge and clean and outfitted with every conceivable modern appliance, but the atmosphere was strangely sad. Everything smelled old, the way places do when they've been locked up a lot. Keene got himself a beer from the fridge and offered me

one. I declined. I pulled my pocket tape recorder out of my jacket and flipped it on as we sat down at a large round oak table by the window.

"Tell me about your wife," I said quietly.

He shook his head. "Cynthia was—I don't know—a complex person, I guess. I never could figure her out. Her moods went up and down all the time. The psychiatrists said she was manic-depressive and borderline schizophrenic, whatever those terms mean. During the last year, especially after her hospitalization, she seemed worse than ever—clinging, demanding, helpless. Sometimes she'd have periods of hyperactivity. Talking real fast, giggling at things that weren't funny . . ." He broke off, seemingly exhausted from saying so much at one time.

His words stuck in my mind. Lana had described Mrs. Keene as talking too much and giggling and crying a lot, but Lana had interpreted this behavior to be that of an immature person in love. Where was the truth?

Keene looked me straight in the eye. "I know a lot of people feel I treated her badly, and maybe I did, from their point of view. But I tried. The best doctors, the best hospitals. That

last summer, she was supposed to stay in the institution—the doctors thought she needed more treatment. But she refused, and her condition—well, she was still legally competent. She couldn't be forced to stay against her will. So I brought her home and had nurses for her round the clock, and Cynthia made everybody miserable. She fired half the nurses, and the others quit. Three different agencies refused to send anyone else.

"Finally, I suggested she come up here for the rest of the summer. I thought it would be quiet and restful—maybe whatever was bothering her would work itself out. We had a live-in nurse at first, but before long Cynthia decided she didn't like her either. She did take a liking to the little Indian girl we'd hired to cook and clean, and I figured maybe that was the best I could do. At least someone was around to keep an eye on her."

"Did you know about Crenshaw?"

Keene leaned back in his chair, recrossed his legs, and lit a cigarette before he answered. "I'm no fool. I knew what was going on."

"Did you confront her?"

He shook his head. "There was no point in confronting Cynthia." He blew a lungful of

smoke toward the window and said softly, "I don't know whether you can understand this, sheriff. But when you live with a crazy person, there comes a point when you have to make a choice. Either you pull away, or you go crazy yourself."

He flicked his ashes on the floor. "I pulled away. Maybe it was the wrong thing to do. Or maybe it was just survival on my part. I don't know. At any rate, by the end of that summer, there was no real connection between Cynthia and me. If she wanted Crenshaw after all I'd done for her, I wasn't going to bother to fight for her."

"Were you angry?"

He thought a moment. "Of course I was angry. It wasn't fair! Cynthia was only a temporary secretary when I met her. I gave her everything. Jewels, clothes, cars, trips abroad—and the more I gave her, the crazier she got. I put up with a lot those last couple of years—and then she turned around and ran off with some unethical shrink."

"Did you ever meet Crenshaw?"

"Oh, yes! Oily little man. I told him what I thought of doctors who seduced sick women."

"And what did he say?"

"He had the nerve to say that Cynthia wouldn't be so sick if

I paid more attention to her. I almost slugged him on the spot." Keene frowned. "You know, he told me then that the affair was over. He was going back to Chicago in a couple of days and wouldn't be seeing her any more. And like a fool, I believed him. I—"

There was a knock at the door and Keene rose to answer it. Oscar Fogel stomped in, his round cheeks ruddy with excitement. "Howard, Calla said you were here. You've got to do something. Somebody's shooting in my woods, and it isn't hunting season. Besides, that land is posted."

"Did you see who it was?"

"No. But whoever it was damned near shot my dog!"

I considered. "I'll stop by later on my way into town and have a look, Oscar." I sighed and wondered why on earth I ever thought this would be a good week for my deputy to take a vacation.

Having calmed down a bit, Oscar left, and Keene lit another cigarette. "Anything else you want to know?" he asked.

I thought a moment. "According to the records, you were in Minnesota at the time your wife and Dr. Crenshaw disappeared. That right?"

He nodded. "I was out inspecting a site for a shopping

mall I was going to build.”

I didn’t say anything, but I couldn’t help thinking that it was less than an hour’s flight to Little Deer Lake from Keene’s place in Minnesota. It was still possible he had sneaked in a quick flight to confront the man who had cuckolded him. On the other hand, there wasn’t a shred of evidence that he’d done so.

I sighed. “I guess that’s all for now. Thank you for your help.”

I rose and headed for the door. I was halfway out when I remembered something. “By the way,” I said, “when you were coming in on your first approach today, you pulled up sharply and circled again when you saw me. Why?”

He frowned. “It wasn’t because I saw you,” he said. “I saw something in the water—at the end of the dock. I couldn’t tell how close to the surface it was, and I didn’t want to risk damaging my plane.”

“Something in the water?” I asked. “What did it look like?”

He shrugged. “Hard to tell. The lake’s muddy and it’s about twenty feet deep at the end of the pier. I had that area dredged when I put the dock in so I wouldn’t have any problems securing the plane when the lake was low. But whatever is in there is pretty big.”

I had a sinking feeling. There

were too many crazy things happening lately. “Let’s have a look.”

We stood at the end of the dock and peered into the water, but the afternoon sun was reflecting too strongly off the surface for us to see anything below.

“You can see it pretty clearly from the air,” Keene said. “Let’s go up.”

A few minutes later, I was pressing my nose against the cabin window, looking down and swearing under my breath. “That’s my cruiser! Who in the name of sweet heaven would drive my car into a lake? Of all the rotten luck!”

Keene actually smiled. “It could have been worse. This is a mud-bottomed lake. In another day or two, we wouldn’t have been able to see it at all.”

I used his phone to summon some heavy-duty towing equipment and called a couple of local fellows who do diving and asked them to come out and see if they could help salvage the cruiser. Then I drove out to Oscar’s place, but there was no one around, and I didn’t see anything unusual, so I headed back to town.

Running Thunder was waiting for me. “I hear you found the cruiser,” he said.

“Bad news travels fast,” I grumbled. I opened my filing

cabinet, pulled out my bottle of rye, and took a healthy swig from it. It was the first time I'd ever drunk when I was officially on duty. I offered the bottle to Rusty, but he shook his head.

"I wonder why someone would steal a car just to drive it into a lake," he said.

I took another swig. "Who knows? It's just plain crazy! Hell, the whole world's gone crazy this week! Maybe those bones you found have a curse on them."

"Maybe. But I think the curse is wearing off. At least a couple of things went right for me today."

"Oh, yeah? What happened?"

"For one thing, the state police said I could give the drillers the go-ahead. And the civil engineer says the old foundation is solid enough to build on it. The work starts on Monday."

I slapped him on the back. "Good for you! Maybe I'll come out and pound a few nails with you for luck."

"With the kind of luck you're having, I don't think you ought to share it with anyone," he replied.

"True." I started to take another swig and thought better of it. "I just don't—"

The door swung open and Oscar Fogel lumbered into my

office, toting a rifle. "We got her!"

I stared at him. "Who?"

"Mary Bear! She was the one who was shooting around my place. That woman is loco. She tried to kill me. Luckily, she ran out of bullets before one of them hit home." He held up the rifle. There was something very familiar about it.

I took it from him. "This is mine!" I said. "It was—"

"In the trunk of the cruiser," Rusty finished for me. "I think we've found your car thief, Howard."

"Where is she now?" I asked Oscar.

He flushed and stammered. "W-well, she—actually, she's in the back of my pickup. It took three of us to catch her. Hank and Pete and I—we—well, we had to hog-tie her."

Rusty and I marched out to the street, where we were greeted by as pathetic a sight as I've ever seen. Mary Bear, wrapped in a noxious bundle of rags, lay in the bed of the pickup, her hands and feet tied with clothesline. It was the first time I'd ever seen her up close. Her skin was blue-gray, very sickly-looking. A couple of her front teeth were broken, I noticed, and there was a kind of animal intelligence in her dark eyes. She was growling and

making noises that didn't sound at all human. The smell of her was overpowering.

I looked at Running Thunder and saw a faraway look come into his eyes. "She's in a bad way, Howard. I've seen people like this before. Something terrible has happened to her."

He leaned forward and spoke to her softly. "Now, Mary, we're not going to hurt you. We're here to help you."

She snarled at him, but he continued, "You know you need help, don't you?"

Running Thunder went on, gently; reassuringly, for about five minutes. Then, abruptly, the growling stopped and Mary Bear went limp and closed her eyes. Rusty hopped into the bed of the pickup and took her into his arms.

"You still got that cot in your office, Howard? Better pull it out and call Doc."

He carried her in and we managed to get her to lie down until Doc came. I remember thinking I'd have to fumigate the whole place after we got her out of there.

Doc was appalled at the woman's condition. "Malnutrition, animal bites, cold weather—it's a wonder she's still alive. I'm going to have her taken by ambulance to County General. She needs to be hospitalized."

While he was on the phone, the door opened and Alex Keene strode in. "Sheriff, they've got your cruiser out of the lake, and there's something you should know."

"What's that?"

"They found a second car—they haven't got it out yet, but they think it's a Porsche. It must be Crenshaw's. After all—"

He caught sight of Mary Bear on the cot and suddenly all the color drained from his face. "My God!" he exclaimed softly. "Cynthia?"

He started to keel over, but Rusty and I caught him before he hit the floor.

I bought Rusty a thick steak at the diner that Sunday evening. "Little by little, the loose ends are being tied up," I said, buttering my second dinner roll. "The State Crime Lab finally got around to telling me that the bones belonged to a white man in his early thirties who fits Crenshaw's description. And I talked with one of the psychiatrists who examined Mrs. Keene. He says that after they gave her some medication to calm her down, she was able to tell him a little bit of what happened.

"Crenshaw was leaving her. He'd stopped by as he was setting off for Chicago. She begged

him to take her with him, but he refused. He'd parked next to the woodpile, and he was sitting in his car with the top down. When Cynthia Keene realized that he wasn't going to change his mind, something snapped. She grabbed the axe and hit him with it. Then when she saw what she'd done, she panicked.

"She knew that if she drove the car off the dock, the deep water and the mud would make it unlikely to be found. But she was afraid to put the body in the water. It might float. So she dragged it into the woods to the old well and heaved it in there. By that time, she was all covered with blood, and before she could get into the house to clean up, Laughing Waters had returned from town in the jeep. Not knowing what else to do, Mrs. Keene hid out in the woods. Of course, the longer she stayed there, the more impossible it became to go back."

Running Thunder shoved a little mushroom sauce across his plate with a piece of bread.

"All those years. Hiding and being afraid. And really she was just a very sick woman. Think they'll prosecute?"

I shook my head. "Not likely. She belongs in a hospital."

He drained the last of his coffee and stood up. "Sorry to eat and run, but I've got lots to do. Construction begins at sunup." Lana was clearing a table, and he gave one of her braids a gentle tug as he passed.

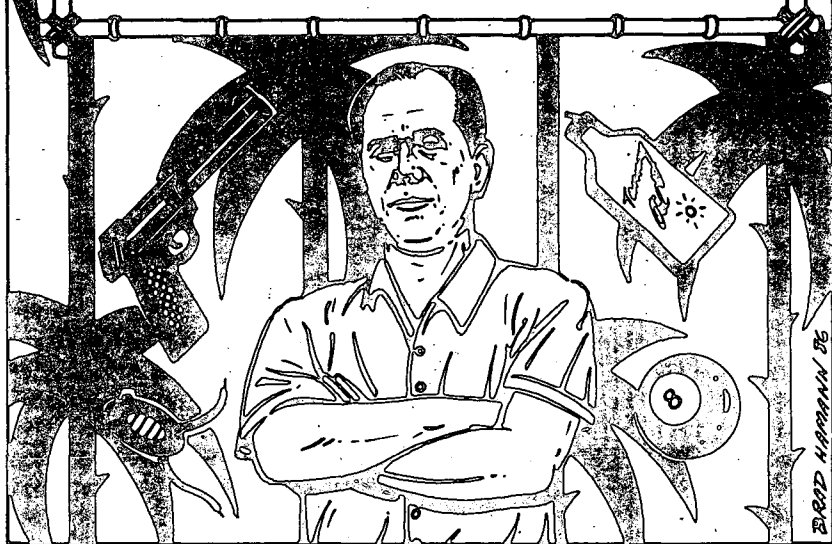
As I watched him go out the door, Laughing Waters came over to me and wiped her hands on her apron. "That man!" she said. "I can't figure him out. He's been seeing me for about six months, and I believe he likes me, but when other people are around, he acts as if I'm his sister. Think I'll ever get him to propose?"

My mouth dropped open and I wondered why I hadn't seen the truth before. I had two friends who had a lot of class, and they'd found each other.

"Give him time, princess," I said. "It'll take him a couple of months to finish the castle."

The Hyphenated Spy

by Gary Alexander



A acceptance of the following, please, is necessary for suspension of disbelief:

1. The Kingdom of Luong actually exists.
2. It is a remote Southeast Asian backwater surrounded by China, Burma, Laos, and Thailand.
3. It was granted independence by the French in the 1950's and is sometimes known as the Fourth Indochina.
4. It is a constitutional monarchy ruled by seventy-six-year-old Prince Novisad Pakse, a cagy neutralist who straddles the geopolitical fence by the simple act of naming and renaming the streets of its capital, Hickorn, in honor of powerful foreign leaders.
5. Prince Pakse's abiding passion is pocket billiards and some

regard him as a senile fool, but his country has managed to avoid the revolutionary turmoil suffered by its neighbors.

6. The Kingdom of Luong is the size of Louisiana.

7. It has the gross national product of Baton Rouge.

8. Luong's northern highlands are wild and mountainous, its river valleys in the south, lush and tropical.

9. Hickorn was established by the French on the banks of the Ma San River. It is hot, humid, and sleepy.

10. Hickorn Superintendent of Police Bamsan Kiet is charged with the control of crime and the safety of the capital's citizens and visitors.

11. Superintendent Kiet prefers no crime at all, but he realizes that such an ideal is not possible. He knows that he must live with generic crime—robbery and murder and burglary and assault. What makes his stomach churn is the subtle sort that involves foreigners.

Thank you.

“You apprehended a what?”

“A spy, superintendent,” Captain Binh said eagerly.

Superintendent of Police Bamsan Kiet had just arrived at work. His earnest young adjutant was telling him something he did not wish to hear. “Spy as in espionage, or as in voyeur?”

“Without question a foreign agent. An American. She was in the Ministry of Defense offices and evidently became careless. She activated an alarm. A guard chased her outside. My patrolmen captured her.”

Kiet sighed. He was a large man, wide and tall, a rarity amongst his lithe countrymen. He was closer to sixty than fifty, near retirement. He did not need this aggravation. “Binh, how can you be so certain, so soon, that this individual—”

“Susan Jacobs-Sloan, superintendent. That is her name.”

“Yes. This Sloan woman, why do you believe she is a spy?”

“Because she had in her hand a covert listening device. A bug. Our men and army intelligence officers are searching the Ministry now, superintendent. The place is infested with bugs.”

Captain Binh had studied with the District of Columbia Police Department. He loved the westerners' law enforcement technology. He loved even better their slang.

“A bug?”

"A miniaturized transmitter," Binh offered quickly. "Very powerful, very state-of-the-art. Its signal could easily reach the U.S. Embassy."

"We have never had a spy in Luong," Kiet said. "We have no secrets anybody desires."

"Apparently we do," Binh said grimly. "The devices are being discovered in the telephones and light fixtures of every general's office and in the communications section."

"Has your suspect admitted guilt?"

"She denies everything, superintendent. I have sent a man to bring the polygraph. I hope it will function."

Kiet remembered the polygraph, a gift from the Soviets, proffered soon after the Americans had donated a ballistics machine. Both were stored unused. Luong had little need and fewer qualified technicians. Kiet imagined tropical humidity attacking the lie detector's innards like bacteria: "Where is your prisoner?"

"In the holding cell," Captain Binh said. "The tank."

"The tank," Kiet said, wincing at the slang. "Of course."

Susan Jacobs-Sloan was beautiful for an Occidental, Kiet decided. In the days when attractive, sensual women were a more important factor in his life, he had preferred them dark and petite, in traditional silk dresses, their hair wrapped tightly in buns, cinched with gold barretts.

Jacobs-Sloan was the antithesis. She was even taller than he and her blonde hair fell well below her shoulders. She had blue eyes and rimless glasses. Her skin was as dark as a Luongan's, though the tone was peculiar, a result, it appeared, of intentional exposure to the sun.

She wore shorts, which abbreviated the longest legs Kiet had ever seen. Underneath her top was nothing but Susan Jacobs-Sloan.

"I didn't do whatever it is I'm being accused of doing," she said defiantly.

"Who are you? Why are you in Hickorn, rummaging about in a government facility?"

"I wasn't rummaging. I was running. I heard someone cry for help inside that building. I went in. A door in the alley was ajar. A man grabbed me and spun me around. He placed a gadget in my hand and ran out the door, slamming it behind him. Alarms began sounding and guards came into the room, yelling at me. I guess I

panicked. I went outside and was arrested by your officers."

"Running where?"

"Just running. I run every morning. I try to get in at least five miles."

Kiet frowned. Running to nowhere? He would deal with that later. "Again, please, who are you?"

"I'm a student. I have a six-month visa, but it's in my apartment. I'm writing my doctoral dissertation on Luong. It's entitled 'A Monarchical Third World Anachronism.'"

Kiet despised the term Third World. It was to him a child characterized as a waif. "Describe the man who lured you into the ministry building and gave you the gadget."

"He was Luongan. Average size and build. Around thirty years old. He wore slacks and a white shirt."

"That will be a great deal of help, I'm sure. Getting back to your five mile run, please, why were you in that particular area at that particular time?"

"Because I always am," she said. "I have an apartment on Avenue Mikhail Gorbachev. I head east to Rue Ne Win, turn north, go around the Royal Palace, backtrack to Rue Willie Mosconi, turn east on Avenue Mao Tse-Tung—"

"Which separates the Ministry of Defense building and the park to the south."

"Yes. I usually rest for a moment in the park, then go north until Richard Nixon Boulevard, and swing around along the waterfront on my way home."

"A set routine?"

"Five days a week."

"You say you're a student. Are you involved with the United States government and its embassy in any manner?"

"No. Really, I'm not," she said, her tone softening. "I'm not a spy like your Captain Binh suggested. I'm just a grad student. And speaking of the embassy, when can I get to see somebody from there?"

"Doubtless soon," Kiet said. "I presume they've been notified. I'll visit them myself before I search your apartment."

Susan Jacobs-Sloan nodded. "I've learned in my research that a warrant isn't needed."

"Correct."

"Go ahead. I welcome it. You won't find anything incriminating."

"One last thing," Kiet said. "Your name is hyphenated like a Britisher's, but you claim to be American."

"Jacobs is my maiden name. Sloan is my husband's. I retained mine when we married."

"Where is your husband?"

"He's home. I need to notify him about this mess, too."

"He let you come halfway around the world for six months?" asked the amazed Kiet.

"He's been very supportive," Susan said. "He's an attorney and I worked as a stockbroker when we married. I wasn't enjoying much job satisfaction and I'd always been fascinated by the Far East. When I have my doctorate, I'll be able to teach at the university level."

"I will investigate your story. In the meantime, you must remain as our guest. We'll make you as comfortable as possible."

"I appreciate your kindness," she said, her eyes moistening. "Please get to the bottom of this: I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't!"

Bamsan Kiet said he would try. After he had walked halfway to the United States embassy, he realized what this strange and lovely woman was. He regularly read the overseas edition of *Time* magazine. Susan Jacobs-Sloan was a member of that peculiar American subspecies known as Yuppie.

Kiet shivered in the waiting room. As always, the American embassy's air-conditioning system was working marvelously. He wondered if they recruited personnel from their arctic provinces of Minnesota and Alaska.

Ambassador Smithson was away, he was told, at a State Department conference in Bangkok. Good news. Smithson was a virulent anticommunist who would surely occupy him all morning with a tirade on how Jacobs-Sloan had been duped by the Soviets into committing espionage.

An attaché by the name of Farragut greeted him instead. Farragut was dressed in a dark suit, white shirt, and tie. His hair seemed sculptured. "Superintendent, before we commence, I must say that we do not engage in covert operations in Luong."

"I am not implying that you do, Mr. Farragut. Please, what do you know about my suspect?"

"Her papers are in order. We're running a background check on her, and you'll receive the report as soon as we do. Let me make this perfectly clear, though. She was not connected to our government, officially or unofficially."

"It is a serious charge—"

"One that might be addressed to the Russians, superintendent. It's no secret that the Luong Rouge are their clients. Information derived from bugging your military HQ would be invaluable to them."

Luong Rouge guerrillas had been sporadically active in the highlands for years. Kiet did not perceive them as much of a threat. Luongans were politically apathetic, and the communist insurgents were remarkably inept. Their last major campaign was an assault on an army fuel dump. It went amiss when the Rouge sappers ignited their explosive charge while crawling through barbed wire protecting the perimeter.

"I will concede the possibility, sir, but why would they choose a person who is, shall we say, conspicuous?"

Farragut winked. "She's a looker, isn't she? I've met her. I don't know. She's an American citizen entitled to services the embassy provides, but she's basically on her own."

Susan Jacobs-Sloan's apartment house was two stories of stucco in a clean neighborhood peopled by Luongan merchants and bureaucrats. The smattering of westerners living in the area were middle-class by their standards, but unable to afford lush villas in the International District.

Kiet introduced himself to the building manager, a stout, elderly woman named Lei. She showed him through Susan's flat. It was small, sparsely furnished, and tidy. Kiet found nothing but books, clothing, and innocuous personal articles.

"What do you know about her?"

"She was quiet and paid her rent on time," Lei said. "I had no complaints to speak of."

"To speak of? Please elaborate."

"She wasn't a loose woman," Lei said. "She had no men friends."

"Continue," Kiet said. "I know you wish to tell me something."

Lei went into the bathroom and brought from the medicine cabinet a bottle of sunscreen. "I never saw this lotion before Mrs. Jacobs-Sloan moved in. I asked her once and she said it blocked out the sun's ultraviolet rays."

"Your point, please, Lei."

"If you want to avoid the sun's rays, you stay indoors at midday when it is the hottest, don't you? Any sane Luongan rests or sleeps."

Kiet nodded in agreement. "Westerners call it siesta."

"Mrs. Jacobs-Sloan didn't. Almost every day, she would take this

lotion and a blanket to the roof and lie there and roast."

"Ah," Kiet said. "Tanning. A Yuppie activity. Did you know that they have indoor parlors for this in America? They can brown in the dead of winter. I remember this from a magazine article."

"A what activity?"

"Never mind. Please, what is your complaint with her?"

"I don't believe she is immoral, superintendent, but she is hardly modest. She would go up on the roof in a robe, remove it, and lie there with no clothes on. Even though she was alone and locked the door behind her and nobody could see her, it isn't right, is it?"

Bamsan Kiet made no comment.

Ambassador Kalashnikov was a ruddy man with a cowlick and massive hands. Kiet imagined him as a former Ukrainian tractor driver who had been awarded this diplomatic post on the basis of heroically exceeding threshing quotas.

Kiet was with him in his office, on the fourth and top floor of the Soviet embassy, two blocks from Susan Jacobs-Sloan's home. Their air-conditioning system was humming loudly and doing little else. If it weren't for the foul Russian cigarette-the ambassador was smoking, the ninety degree/ninety percent humidity environment would have been rather pleasant.

"I am glad to see you, superintendent," Kalashnikov said. "I commend you for your fine work in capturing the American spy."

"Thank you, sir. I mean no offense, but I am required by prudent police procedures to ask if you have any knowledge of the woman."

Kalashnikov laughed heartily. "No offense taken. I have never seen her before in my life, nor have any of my staff. I asked when I heard of your timely and efficient arrest. We have no spies in Luong. You are our friends."

"Then it is an ugly lie that all Soviet citizens abroad owe primary allegiance to the KGB, whether they are directly employed by them or not?"

"American propaganda. Not that I have a quarrel with a national police apparatus. On the contrary, you would find it useful. I have discussed this with Prince Pakse. I play billiards with him, you know. His Royal Highness is proficient at the game. With our help, you could establish an effective information network. You would know what everybody in Luong is doing and thinking. It would be a great tool for you, superintendent."

"Thank you for the thought, sir, but gossip and rumor are Luon-

gan hobbies. They usually suffice in my investigation of ordinary crime. But espionage—this case is perplexing.”

Kalashnikov spread thick arms. “It is so simple! The woman is a slut, a tramp. While she may be no CIA professional, she is the sort easily recruited. She worships the imperialistic gods of money and ambition.”

“Please, your theory on the Americans’ motivation. Would they not be foolish to assign an obviously inept person the responsibility of installing, uh, bugs in our military headquarters?”

“Simpler still, Kiet,” Kalashnikov said, looking at him as teacher to child. “They are careless and stupid. The imperialist attitude of superiority betrayed them this time.”

“Of course,” Kiet said, thinking of the Americans’ silent and relentlessly efficient air conditioning. “Of course.”

The hallway leading to Kiet’s office was dark. Kiet’s office was dark. Every room in the station was dark, but for the one in which a uniformed officer illuminated Captain Binh with a flashlight. The room smelled of burnt rubber.

“Binh, it’s bright as gold outside. Are we having our own personal solar eclipse?”

The young captain was bent over a desk, screwdriver in hand. On the desk was a partially disassembled machine. “Superintendent! The polygraph. I plugged it in and poof! No doubt it’s merely a loose wire. I’ll have it repaired momentarily.”

Caution, Kiet thought. Ridicule him in the company of a patrolman and the loss of face would be irreparable. Kiet would never again get a decent day’s work out of the man.

“You are planning to interview the American woman with it?”

“Yes, superintendent. After we are done, we will confront her with each lie. She will have no choice but to confess.”

“Excellent, captain. But first, shouldn’t we solidly repudiate her story?”

“The man who lured her into the ministry? An obvious fabrication by a desperate person.”

“True, but if we conduct a thorough search for this alleged individual and find no one, you may care to point this out during interrogation.

“She will therefore realize the hopelessness of blaming her deeds on a nonexistent criminal and perhaps strike a bargain which includes a confession. She is studying our culture. She is aware how Luongans gossip.”

Binh put down the screwdriver. "A good idea, sir. I'll compile a list of all known burglars who have the skills to break into the ministry and consult my informants. The woman will know we tried our best."

"Also, please, take a little cash from the miscellaneous fund and loosen tongues with it."

"I don't understand, superintendent? Isn't that a waste of money?"

"Not necessarily, captain. We may glean information useful in other cases."

"I'll bring you a full report on everyone I hear anything of interest about."

"I am especially curious which qualified burglars you learn *nothing* about," said Bamsan Kiet.

It looked like moving day in the office of the Minister of Defense Cuong Van. Carpeting had been pulled up, fixtures and cabinets dismantled. Minister Van's desk was in pieces, so he was forced to do his business from a chair in the corner.

"Look at this chaos, Kiet," Cuong Van said, gesturing. "The more things we tear apart, the more wires and miniature radios we find. Whoever did this knows everything."

Cuong Van and Bamsan Kiet were good friends. Formerly commander in chief of the Royal Luongan Army, Van had been awarded this job for his years of loyalty and honesty. He was a first cousin of Prince Pakse and had extinguished a number of coup d'état attempts before they caught fire, some with Kiet's help.

"Whoever is the question, sir."

"You have a suspect, I am told."

Kiet was silent.

"I share your skepticism. A western academic with sexy legs seems an unlikely candidate."

"Sir, can you assess the damage done by the eavesdropping?"

"That puzzles me," Van said, giving him a small black object that did indeed resemble an insect. "Our operations against the Rouge and the opium smugglers in the highlands have not been compromised, modest as they are. Somebody has been listening to ministry conversations on these baby radios, yet we have suffered no harm."

"Are conspiracies brewing, sir? Even rumors of such? Or are major offensives in the works against the communists and the drug trade?"

"No. My staff is loyal and my policy is not to escalate activities unless our antagonists do, and they haven't of late."

"A sensitive subject, sir," Kiet said. "The security here."

"Extremely lax, Kiet. Our alarm and lock systems are antiquated, but they are due to be replaced soon. Troops in the building during off-duty hours are not as numerous and conscientious as I guarantee they will be in the future."

"Excuse me, sir. The systems? To be replaced by whom?"

Cuong Van laughed. "Kiet, do you recall when His Royal Highness changed Avenue Charles de Gaulle to Avenue Mikhail Gorbachev?"

"The French took exception, didn't they?"

Cuong Van laughed again. "Oh yes. They surely did. Ambassador Doumer absented himself from several important parties. After the obligatory pouting was accomplished, the ambassador and his government presented us a gift."

Kiet smiled. If Prince Pakse's redesignation of Hickorn's streets appeared to some as buffoonery, so be it. The technique always managed to squeeze a few extra dollars or francs or rubles or yen out of superpower foreign aid budgets. "What manner of gift, please?"

"A brand-new alarm and electronic security arrangement for the ministry. It is due to be installed at the end of the month."

"I didn't know," Kiet said.

"Nobody did. The deal was consummated only last week."

Kiet juggled the bug in his hands. "Can it be determined who manufactured this?"

"My people tell me it is German-made, but readily available to anybody who pays the price."

"And our price to the French?"

"General de Gaulle is being rehabilitated, Kiet. He is to replace Rue Pol Pot."

"Though it isn't general knowledge, sir, would anybody monitoring these spy devices have learned?"

"Certainly. And the strange part of this, Kiet, is that Pol Pot was soon to be gone, anyway. The man is a monster, you know."

"Suritan Loc is dead, superintendent," Captain Binh said. "His body was found in a tenement along the riverfront. A single bullet wound in a temple. A neat, professional job."

Kiet was familiar with Suritan Loc, one of Hickorn's career criminals. He had served time for burglary, shoplifting, and confidence games.

"I mourn for his mother," Kiet said. "She deserved better than his birth. Fast tongue, faster hands. He preyed on foreigners and citizens alike."

"I was making inquiries, as you asked," Binh said. "Nobody mentioned Loc. Nobody knew what he was doing these days. I received a report of a murder, investigated, and there he was."

"Witnesses?"

"No, not yet."

"None will be forthcoming, Binh. Bring Susan Jacobs-Sloan, please. We will view the body."

"Superintendent—"

"The thoroughness we discussed?"

Binh obeyed, though reluctantly. The woman was brought out handcuffed and Binh insisted that a guard accompany them. Jacobs-Sloan was almost cheerful, apparently happy at the change of routine, so Kiet made no comment regarding the procedure.

At the morgue, Binh requested that Kiet examine the corpse with him before admitting the spy. Kiet agreed and they went into the "cooler."

"Note the powder burns at the point of entry," Binh said. "The gun, probably a .25 automatic, was fired at point-blank range. Obviously the killer and the victim knew each other. Loc was clever. He wouldn't have allowed a stranger such an opportunity."

Kiet pretended to gaze at the lifeless Suritan Loc. He was actually focusing on an undead, unbloody spot on the wall beyond. He inhaled, suppressing nausea and his deepest secret. A man queasy at the sight of human violence would be deemed unworthy to lead Hickorn's finest. "Was there anything of value in Loc's room? Large sums of foreign currency, for instance?"

"No. As far as we can tell, he lived as a poor man."

"I would recommend, please, that we ask the mortician to lay out two or three male corpses of comparable age. If he has them in inventory, of course. A horizontal lineup, as it were."

"Superintendent, I have already done so. I anticipated this request before we left headquarters and telephoned ahead. On the slab to our left, a victim of a bicycle accident—"

"I see," said Kiet, who refused to. "Excellent. Bring the woman, please."

Binh went out and returned with the shackled Susan Jacobs-Sloan. "That's him," she cried immediately, staring at Suritan Loc. "Inconclusive," Binh muttered. "Loc had no extraordinary features."

"I know," Susan said. "That's what I told you. He was an average-looking man of thirty, but I still recognize him. That's the man!"

"Come," Kiet said. "Let's do some police work."

Kiet persuaded Binh that the guard was unneeded. Binh grudgingly agreed and they released him at headquarters. They went to Susan's apartment, made a perfunctory search for Binh's benefit, and walked up to the roof.

"Splendid view," Kiet said, swiveling his head.

"Of what?" Binh asked.

"Why, look ahead toward downtown. The Hickorn Continental Hotel. See. And off to the northeast, the Royal Palace. To the south, Luong University. Most of it isn't visible, though. The structures are low. Understand what I am saying, Binh? A two-story building and it is as tall as its immediate neighbors, so you are able to drink in a glorious panorama of lovely Hickorn."

"Superintendent, I am respectfully wondering why we are enjoying scenery."

"What did I miss in my description of the skyline?"

"Well, the Soviet embassy—"

"Ah. Two blocks distant, two floors higher. I can clearly see the windows of Ambassador Kalashnikov's office suite. Mrs. Jacobs-Sloan, your landlady said that you sunbathed."

"The tropical sun's fantastic," she said. "In the early afternoon, it's vertical, directly overhead. My friends at home would be so envious."

"Excuse me, please. How did you dress during these tanning sessions?"

Susan Jacobs-Sloan looked at Kiet, looked at the Soviet embassy, threw her hands to her face, handcuff chains clanking, and said, "Oh, my God!"

"Indeed," Kiet said.

"What?" Binh said.

"Ma'am, can you be packed in ten minutes?" Kiet asked.

"I—I guess so. Am I free?"

"Yes. On my terms."

"Superintendent!"

"I'll explain later, Binh. We'll help you. The remainder can be shipped."

"My dissertation. It isn't finished."

"Take your manuscript, then, and your memories. Write an addendum on Luong's police procedures. Royal Air Luong has late flights to Bangkok and Calcutta. The choice is yours."

"Superintendent," Binh cried, "if she is not the spy, who is?"

"Past tense, captain. Who *was*."

"Marxist lechers, superintendent. Grim, stolid men clutching binoculars with sweaty paws," Prince Pakse said as he chalked his cue stick. "That is an amusing image."

"And an accurate one, I feel, Your Highness," Kiet said. "Their voyeurism was the germ of an idea."

Prince Pakse squinted at the array of balls on the billiard table and said, "Sex and skulduggery. Who but the Russians could blend so naturally from one to the other?"

"It was easy, Your Highness," Kiet said, standing as stiffly in the Royal Billiards Room as his soft bulk would permit. "Susan ran the same route at the same time. When they observed her trotting through the alley adjoining the Ministry of Defense in the early morning, their scheme was hatched."

"The unfortunate thief, how precisely did he fit in?"

"Suritan Loc, sir. Adroit at his profession and greedy. The Russians promised him an extraordinary payday, but little did he know how extraordinary."

"You are speculating that he entered the ministry weeks or months ago and secreted transmitters. Do you have firm evidence, superintendent?"

"Only circumstantial. They monitored the ministry, absorbing every word. It must have been frustrating for them to discover scant information of value."

Prince Novisad Pakse shot. The nine ball dropped softly into a side pocket. "And you further speculate that they panicked when they learned the French were due to revamp the security apparatus."

"Yes, Your Highness. If they could not gain information, they could at least create an incident by blaming the Americans. When the French technicians came upon the, uh, bugs, both superpowers would be suspected. Haste was of the-essence. The risk of Loc's

successfully removing the bugs before the arrival of the French was greater than using him to frame an American."

Click, click. Three ball in a corner pocket. "Why are you so convinced of Soviet guilt?"

"Neither side would be so clumsy as to employ this woman. Logic dictates that it was a setup. If the suspect had been a bumbling Russian, I would have directed my suspicion toward the Americans. Also, Ambassador Kalashnikov denied ever seeing Jacobs-Sloan, yet referred to her in terms that could be considered sexually uncomplimentary. He knew her well. From a distance. She will certainly intrude on his fantasies for many years hence."

"She is a student and a—what is that term?—Yuppie?"

"Yes, Your Highness. I have done considerable research on the phenomenon. A primary Yuppie goal is gratification via the envious perception of others, a goal that necessarily requires conspicuousness and appearances. Conspicuousness is the bane of espionage professionals."

"You escorted Jacobs-Sloan to an airplane, did you not?"

"I felt it best. She had not been formally charged. Besides, a bug was found in Suritan Loc's room."

"Ah, physical evidence." Click, click, click. Six ball in a corner, cue ball nudging the eleven. "Careless of him. Those critical of your handling of the situation might accuse you of placing the device on his lifeless body in order to justify your theory."

Kiet cleared his throat. "I would never lie to you, Your Highness."

"Of that I am aware. That is why I stated it as a remark, instead of a question."

"Crimes involving foreigners seldom have clear-cut solutions, Your Highness. A protracted investigation would surely be ugly and ultimately inconclusive."

"Stay for dinner, Kiet. I need to discuss with you Yuppies and their methods of creating favorable appearances. I am always seeking to improve in that regard."

Bamsan Kiet finally began to relax. "I would be honored, Your Highness."

FICTION

Next in Line

by Thomasina Weber



As Mark Miller swung his other leg over the guardrail he wondered if he would lose his hat on the way down. "Going for a swim?" asked a voice behind him.

Mark sighed. If there was anything he did not want, it was a nosy do-gooder. Mark turned his head carefully. Because of his girth, his sense of balance was not very good. Only a year ago he had been an imposing figure of a man—attractive in spite of his advancing baldness—tall and strong and forceful. His troubles of the past year, though, had pushed him toward obesity, quite the opposite of most men who, faced with a similar situation, would have turned into scarecrows.

The man standing behind him was not very distinguishable in

the half light, for Mark had chosen a spot exactly halfway between the lampposts, thankful for once that this was a ten o'clock town. He could see, however, that the man was fairly small, the sort of person you forget two minutes after you passed him on the street. His glasses were too large and too round for his face. He was wearing dark slacks and a plaid shirt buttoned at the throat. Mark was surprised at his own powers of observation; lately he had been so preoccupied that he never noticed anything or anybody.

"Aren't you afraid you'll fall?" the man persisted. "The river is a long way down."

Ordinarily Mark would have shriveled the man with a few well-chosen words, for he detested people who could not mind their own business. Tonight, however, perched on the guardrail, Mark felt almost tolerant. He held tightly to the rail lest he float off, for after the tension of the past year and the incredible events of this last week, which had driven him to this moment, he felt buoyant enough to soar right off the bridge and fly, free and unfettered, wherever he desired. And all because he had made the decision to kill himself.

"They say suicide is the coward's way out," the man went on, "but I don't agree. It takes courage to kill yourself."

Mark was not in the mood for an extended conversation. He wanted to be alone, to rejoice over his remarkable state of mind. He had been under the impression that those on the brink of suicide were despairing. Not desperate—because they no longer cared enough to reach such a peak of feeling—but apathetic, beaten, unable to go on. Maybe some suicides did feel that way, but not Mark Miller. He felt delivered, liberated, eager for what comes next, be it a fresh start or restful oblivion.

"I'm glad to see you're not nervous," said the man.

"Why should I be nervous?" replied Mark in annoyance. "The worst is over. It's nothing but a big joke now."

"Well, if you feel that way, why do you want to commit suicide?"

"I feel that way *because* I'm going to commit suicide. Hell, if I had to stay here and face it, I'd go nuts or kill somebody." Suddenly he felt the need to tell someone, to get it out of his system so that he could go with a clear mind.

"Anybody in particular?"

"Dear brother Carl." A moment ago Mark had wanted the man to leave, but now he wanted him to stay, to hear about Carl, as if Mark's words could somehow find his brother and hurt him, strike at his eyes or slip beneath his ribs to slash—

"What did Carl do to you?"

"What's that? Oh, Carl. Well, last year's fire was legitimate—a bunch of fanatics didn't like the war toys I manufacture. But no sooner do I get the factory rebuilt when along comes Carl with his torch. Just because I wouldn't take the bum into the business."

The man clucked and shook his head. "Your very own brother," he said sadly.

"But that's not the clincher," said Mark, his voice rising as he felt the ridiculous laughter beginning to grow. "Day before yesterday he ran off with my wife." Mark tightened his grip on the rail as the laughter threatened to shake him loose. "And wait till you hear this—they took off in my new car!" He wiped a tear from his face as he tried to control his mirth. "I hope they can make the payments."

The man did not smile. "I was going to jump off a bridge once," he said. "This very same bridge, as a matter of fact. Took me three days to get up the courage to try." He sighed. "I never have been much of a success at anything, not even suicide."

"Why didn't you try again?"

"How many people are brave enough to try a second time?"

Mark's laugh had simmered to a smile. He ran his eyes appraisingly over the man, still standing in the same spot. He looked like the typical henpecked husband who would "yes dear" all the way to the grave, the type who would react to abuse, whether from his wife or his boss, by removing his glasses and polishing them with a small treated square of fabric designed solely for that purpose. Mark could not imagine this man being connected with anything vital enough to warrant suicide. Some people just don't know what trouble is, he decided, dismissing the man from his mind and looking down again at the waiting black water.

In a few minutes he would be free. No more responsibilities, no more worries, no more annoying pests like this Minder of Other People's Business. Seated here on the guardrail, Mark was as good as free now. His decision had freed him; the actual act of dying would be anticlimactic.

"I wouldn't be here tonight if a passing motorist hadn't stopped and pulled me down."

Flying free, over the river, over the city—

"The world is full of good samaritans," said the man.

His mind, freed at last, would be able to relax, stretch, reach out, and embrace—

"Did you know there are groups of people dedicated to saving would-be suicides?" the man asked.

Mark frowned and turned to look at him. "Why don't you go wherever you were headed and stop bothering me?"

"Because you are considering jumping off this bridge," said the man.

"Well, don't you think I'm entitled to a little privacy in my last minutes?"

"If it hadn't been for that motorist—"

Mark's head was beginning to ache. Where had his freedom gone? A mosquito landed on his neck and he slapped at it, noticing for the first time how uncomfortable the guardrail was.

"—I would be dead by now."

Because of pests like this, a man could not even die in peace, thought Mark. Someone ought to start a service bureau: Exterminators of Good Samaritans and Other Weird Characters. Maybe he ought to start it himself—and he could include his wife and his brother. Interest fanned the flame of the idea. His businesslike mind, trained to deal methodically with problems, automatically began to compile a list of deserving victims. He had not realized there were so many candidates. His imagination clicked into gear as various exotic murder methods occurred to him. The challenge was fascinating, and even if he did get caught eventually, what did he have to lose? Nothing he had not been prepared to give up voluntarily. The only thing he had left. Merely his life.

He smiled at the man who had unwittingly given him the idea. "Don't you think the world would be a better place if everyone minded his own business?" asked Mark.

"If it hadn't been for that passing motorist—"

"You would be dead."

"Correct. He gave me back my life, something I did not want at the time."

"And now you are grateful."

"On the contrary. I have never forgiven that motorist."

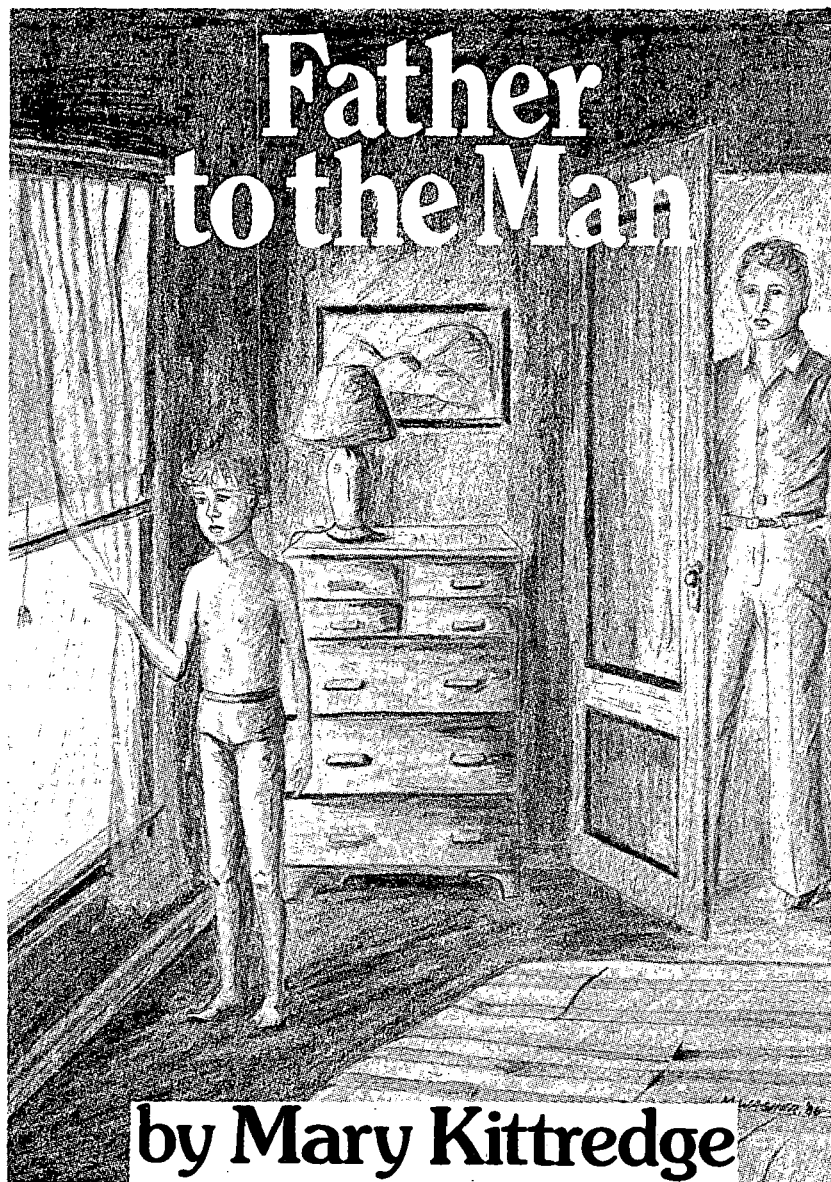
"Then why are you following in his footsteps?"

"But I'm not," said the man. "I'm going to save you from passing motorists."

Mark, half-turned toward him and off balance, felt the thrust of the flattened hands with disbelief. But it was true; Mark was falling, not flying at all, and he was still cursing the little man when he hit the water.

FICTION

Father to the Man



by Mary Kittredge

My Uncle Wallace was murdered twice: once by another drunk, whom he had insulted, and once by me in my heart. Both crimes took place on the same night, which was unlucky, and not only for Uncle Wallace. Later I came to be sorry for his murder and glad of the coincidence, which was the opposite of the way I felt on the morning two Lakeville deputies came to tell me he was dead.

I was thirteen, and I'd spent the night out by the garage, waiting with the twelve-gauge, hiding in the bushes and planning to kill him as soon as he came staggering down the drive. I'd only gone in an hour or so before the Lakeville fellows arrived. When I began to cry, they must have thought I was crying for my uncle.

I wasn't, though. I was crying for myself, out of guilt. I wasn't sure if I could really have pulled the trigger on the twelve-gauge, but he was murdered all the same, and that felt like magic. Awful magic. It seemed I had power I never suspected, all tangled up with my getting bigger and my voice and other things changing, and with my anger. My anger had killed him.

Thirty years later, the sight of Wesley Bodine slouched by a pay phone in Lakeville

brought Uncle Wallace into my thoughts again. Aptly nicknamed Weasel, he was a grudge in the shape of a man, succeeding my uncle with great ability in the position of the town of Lakeville's ne'er-do-well.

Now he glanced up at the telephone as if waiting for a call, but Weasel's call, whatever it was, had come and gone long ago. As if realizing that, he glowered from under the brim of the porkpie hat he wore, winter and summer, and flicked me a surly wave.

I jerked a barely civil nod at him and drove on through the early morning, past the firehouse where Todd Hamish was sluicing down the town's only hook-and-ladder, past the town beach where two teenaged lifeguards were already setting up for minnow-level swimming lessons. Beyond them, small waves slopped sluggishly on the weed-strewn sand. Even by the water, the air was already warm and still, the day promising to thicken later with heat like a smothering hand.

For a moment I regretted leaving the cool confines of my hotel room in Chicago. But the same fatigue that had driven me out of the AMA convention kept me moving now; I was tired of people, and I wanted a few hours alone before facing my waiting room, my daily bat-

tle against all the ills man is heir to.

Taylor Street was elm-shaded and quiet except for a boy tossing rolled newspapers from his bicycle to the porches beyond the sprinklered front lawns. I pulled the Chevette into my own drive alongside the tall white Greek Revival where I lived and had my office. The house was too big for me, even with my medical practice; the ghosts of my wife and two children did not take up much room. Now, after a week of my absence, the windows stared down as if daring me to confront the silence inside.

All my desire for solitude abruptly quashed, I sighed and pulled my bag from the car, and went reluctantly up the flagstone walk.

The phone began ringing as I unlocked the back door, its shrill summons muffling the hollow rap of my footsteps in the hall. Feeling foolishly relieved, I set down my bag and hurried to answer.

"Dr. Price speaking," I began, and then a boy's voice interrupted, sounding urgent and frightened and close to tears.

"I thought I ought to call you," Leonard Innes said, standing in the doorway of his aunt's cottage on Summer Island Way.

With his small thin body and his sandy hair clipped short, he looked more like a ten-year-old than the twelve or thirteen I knew he must be. He wore a T-shirt, dungarees, and sneakers, and his face was pinched with the effort of not crying as he stepped aside to let me in.

I went down the hall to the bedroom where Maisie Innes lay, covered to the waist by a cotton blanket. Her voluminous yellow nightdress and pink mobcap contrasted sharply with the decisive blue of her lips and face.

"Is she—"

"Yes," I said. "She's dead."

Leonard made a sound that might have been a sob. His parents were dead, and he'd lived with Maisie since he was a toddler.

"She was old, you know," I told him gently. "Why don't you leave me here for a few minutes?"

He nodded. "I'll be in my room."

When he was gone I examined her body and found nothing remarkable, not that I had expected anything. Maisie Innes had been living for ten years on a shred of heart muscle that shouldn't have powered a frog's leg. Even after her heart attack she continued to eat, smoke, drink, and curse her Summer Island neighbors with undimin-

ished energy. I thought few would miss her.

Except for Leonard, of course. Taking her brother's orphaned child was one of Maisie's few known acts of charity; redemption enough, perhaps, for a life that was otherwise seamlessly mean and vulgar. She wrote anonymous notes to parents of teenagers whom she spied necking on Summer Beach; she phoned the police to complain when neighbors' parties lasted past ten. She was a busybody, a troublemaker, and a suspected poisoner of wandering neighborhood dogs.

Still, there was Leonard. I wondered what would become of him now.

Clearing aside a welter of tabloid newspapers, magazines, and used tissues, I examined the medicines in her bedside table. The pills I'd prescribed showed evidence of having been sporadically taken at best; no doubt they were doled out by the practical nurse Maisie had for an hour each evening, and ignored the rest of the time. Only the bottle of sleeping capsules was more than two-thirds empty. About twenty Dalmanes remained, and I wrote off the only other cause of death besides heart failure that I might have suspected. Unlikely, anyway: vile, vigorous Maisie was a most unlikely su-

icide, and suicides in any case do not often leave leftovers.

From Maisie's parlor I called Willard Lindeman, Lakeville's only undertaker. Although I didn't know what arrangements Maisie might have wanted, I thought he could take care of her until I found out. Willard's wife said the hearse would be around shortly.

Then I went up to see Leonard.

I found him, as promised, in his room, which was filled with his things: books, an elaborate chemistry set, a small computer, an insect collection, a telescope. On the workbench was a Bunsen burner connected by copper tubing to a small propane tank. Everything was neatly kept. I recognized the self-contained world of a childish hermit, and felt a sudden kinship with him; I myself had lived in such a room once.

Leonard's face was as pale and taut as the sheets on the crisply made up bed where he sat, his skinny thighs barely denting the mattress.

"I'll call your cousin for you, if you like," I said. Maisie's daughter Janet lived in the next town, about twenty minutes away on the other side of the lake.

Leonard shrugged. "I guess. She doesn't like me, though."

"I wouldn't worry about that,

now. Would you like to come into town with me until she gets here?"

He looked out the window. "I'd like to be alone."

It was a curiously grownup remark. With an effort, I reminded myself that Leonard was older than he appeared.

"I'll be all right," he said, apparently understanding my hesitation. "Once Janet gets here, I'll have lots of people around. I mean, she seems like lots of people all by herself."

I had to smile; I had met Janet. And Leonard's wish for solitude echoed so precisely my own earlier desire that I gave in. Probably he would be all right for a little while. Still, I waited until the black station wagon Lindeman used for a hearse had come and gone.

"You'll call if you have any trouble, won't you?"

The boy nodded, looking past me through the open front door as the black car departed.

"Sure," he said. "Thanks."

I stood on the doorstep, still reluctant to leave him.

"You know, your aunt was lucky. She had a good long life, and a decent death, and she had you. Don't feel too bad for her."

Looking up, he met my gaze for the first direct time; the expression in his blue eyes was unnervingly adult.

"No," he said. "No, I won't."

Then he stepped back into the shadows of the cottage interior; the door closed before I had turned away.

It was time for my first appointment. No doubt Henrietta Winkler and her palpitations were already fluttering about my office. Yet I drove back down Summer Island Way very slowly indeed, thinking about Maisie Innes and Leonard.

I didn't know Leonard very well. Maisie, I supposed, had taken him to a pediatrician in the city. And I felt a sense of uneasy guilt over leaving him to clatter around alone in the house where his aunt had just died. Only knowing Janet would be here very soon made me agree to it.

But something else made me uneasy, too: the sense I got of Leonard's desperate control. I told myself he wanted privacy before he would let himself cry, but as I bumped over the railroad tracks into Lakeville again, I found myself thinking of Uncle Wallace for the second time in a single morning.

"He killed her! I don't know how he did it, the disgusting little freak, but I know he killed her!"

Gall bladder, I thought, gazing into Janet Innes's fat, fair face. Hypertension, diabetes—

her blue eyes bulged with fury, or perhaps with hyperthyroidism. I made a mental note to suggest that she take medical advice, some time when she felt calmer.

"Miss Innes," I said, "your mother died of heart failure. It was not unexpected."

"Hah. You would say that."

I thought of asking her why, if she did not trust me, she was endangering my office chair with her considerable bulk. Instead I counted to ten, and glanced at Leonard.

He sat in the other chair across my consulting-room desk, his expression determinedly blank. I would rather have seen him show almost any emotion. When this was over, I thought, he would need some help.

"... sly," Janet Innes said. "Mother told me all about him, how none of his classmates will go near him. Thinks he's so smart, thinks he's better than anyone else."

"I fail to see why Leonard's rather retiring nature makes you suspect him of murder," I said.

"Retiring? That's a hot one. You know what he did to his teacher's car? Some awful mischief. Only runs now when the radio's set to the all-sports station, turned up real loud."

The shade of a reminiscent smile ghosted across Leonard's

thin face and then vanished.

"Mr. Potter's the track coach," he said. "Wanted me to join. He said it would do a little wimp like me a lot of good."

Knowing only too well what life can be like for bookish boys, I could not help feeling that Mr. Potter had gotten what he deserved. Still, we were talking now about murder.

"... unnatural," Janet went on. "But he's not so awful smart as he thinks. I want an autopsy done on my mother."

Leonard sat up straighter and his face went paler, if that was possible.

"See? He takes note of that, all right," Janet observed grimly.

By now I disliked Janet Innes a good deal.

"If it will ease your mind," I told her, "I will arrange a post mortem examination. But I still don't understand why you think your cousin killed your mother."

She looked at me as if I were being very stupid. "Why, for the money, of course. The fifty thousand dollars."

"She made a new will," Leonard said in a colorless voice. "I wasn't in it."

Janet let out her breath in a hiss of exasperation at him. "Oh, she made a new will every week, you know that. A person couldn't look at her crosseyed without her telling how you'd

just lost your chance at her fortune. The real will's in the safe deposit box, and you know what's in it as well as I do—that junky cottage to me, the insurance to you. All of it, except a few driblets and drabs to her 'faithful retainers—'

She turned to me. "That's what she called them—like she had maids and butlers or something. A thousand to Wanda, that slut who came in nights. And five hundred to the yard boy. The only big winner is Mister Sly-boots there—except we'll just see about that."

"Surely the money goes into a trust," I objected. "Leonard won't even get the interest until he's older."

"Ah, but he don't know that, does he?" she pointed out in triumph. "Lookit the way his ears prick up, it's news to him. And not good news, either, the little—"

"Perhaps," I said flatly, "Leonard should stay here with me until things are settled."

They looked at me with a surprise that could not have been greater than my own. I had not known I was going to say it, only that I could not sit by and watch such brutal emotional battery.

Janet's lips tightened. "I don't care where he goes. I'm staying in Mother's house. Who knows what he might carry off if—"

"That will be all," I said.

She gave me a look of simmering fury and scraped her chair heavily back: a big, beefy woman whose dress, in a bright geometrical print, only emphasized her bulk. The immovable object personified, I thought, and perhaps she preferred it that way. Certainly neither charm nor intelligence had ever won her any battles.

Leonard simply sat. His sneaked feet did not quite touch the floor. If he was grieved or angry, he gave no sign of it, and his wan passiveness made me regret almost at once my impulsive offer.

Especially since, despite my dislike of Janet Innes, I suspected that she might be right.

It was past three o'clock before I could get Willard Lindeman on the phone; he sounded put out when I told him what I wanted.

"Geez, I'm started already," he said. "She left me standin' instructions, like. Had the coffin bought an' paid for, even. You know Maisie, she wanted what she wanted an' nothin' but."

I agreed that this had been so, but asked him to send her over to County Memorial anyway. Then I called Howard Hansen, who was the county coroner and a friend of mine.

"Sure," he said, but resignation was in his voice. "I *was* going to catch the game out at the stadium, but if you need it—"

I told him to go on to the ball game; Maisie would wait till tomorrow, but Howard's two sons were growing up fast.

The rest of my afternoon was spent with ingrown toenails and sore throats and vaccinations, enlivened by a tidbit of local gossip from my office nurse, Rose Flores.

"You're not going to believe this," she said as she gathered an armload of charts from my desk. "Guess who's getting married? Weasel Bodine."

"You're kidding," I said. "Who'd marry him?" Weasel was my age or older, had never held a steady job, and was arrested for drunk and disorderly so often that the local jail kept a coffee cup with his name on it.

"I don't know," Rose said. "Somebody desperate, though. Are you ready to see Mrs. Quigg?"

I sighed. Mrs. Quigg and the two teething quiglets could be heard from the waiting room.

"Sure," I said, glancing out the back yard at Leonard. He sat in the screenhouse under the trees in the back yard, punching steadily at the keys of a pocket calculator. I hoped

he wasn't figuring what his inheritance would come to when he got at it. Then I was swept away in the stream of patients again.

Leonard did not come in at all until my office hours were over and the steady flow of people in and out of my house had stopped. Then I found him in my outer office, staring at a collection of antique surgical instruments I kept in a glass case on the wall.

I laid a hand on his shoulder gently; he winced away nevertheless.

"How do you stand them all?" he asked, still gazing at the row of scalpels, bone-saws—crude instruments from the days when cure was worse, almost, than disease.

I tried to pretend I didn't know what he meant, but I had asked myself the same question too many times.

"All of them coming to your house," he said, "calling you up, making you touch them. You're smarter than they are—why do you stay around here at all?"

"I'm smarter than some of them, I suppose," I said. I thought of Lee and my two kids. Jeffy had Downs' Syndrome; Marty was deaf. Had been deaf. Without wanting to, I still felt the warmth of their hugs. "Some of them are smarter than me."

Leonard shook his head. "You

just say that because you know you have to, to get along."

He sighed, and in the sound I could hear my own thirteen-year-old self. It will get better, I wanted to say, standing there with him in my big old empty house. But I didn't because right then it would have been a lie.

"Come on," I told him, "let's go out and get some supper."

I suppose it happens to every physician sooner or later, but as I heard the chair go over in the crowded dining room, I had a moment to wish intensely that it were not happening to me.

The man had been making an ass of himself, harassing the waitress and ridiculing his wife, bellowing jokes and braying at his own donkeyish wit.

"And then you know what this dumb broad does?" he yelled. "She—"

He took the tablecloth with him when he went over; cups, glasses, and silver clattered down.

I was on my feet before my mind had clearly put the event into words. As I bent over the choking man I glimpsed Leonard, blankly staring.

I threw my keys at him. "My bag. In the car." He nodded and ran.

"I'm a doctor, call an ambulance. It's going to be okay," I

said, mentally crossing my fingers as I pounded the guy on the back with all my strength. Hauling him up, I wrapped my arms around him and drove my clasped fists hard into his upper belly, directing the force upwards at his diaphragm.

His flailing weakened; when I turned him, his eyes were rolled up into his head. Again and again I went through the routine of the Heimlich maneuver, trying to knock out whatever it was that he'd inhaled. I looked up for a moment; horror was written on his wife's face, along with a note of shameful hope that I might fail. I wanted to disappoint her, but it wasn't looking good. Far away an ambulance siren shrieked; it wasn't going to be in time. At last Leonard came puffing back with my bag.

The wife gasped and fainted when she saw what I meant to do. Gritting my teeth, I exposed the guy's throat and cut straight down to the cricoid cartilage, ignoring the blood that welled up. Bleeding to death was the least of his worries. Very soon, he wouldn't have enough blood pressure to bleed at all unless I got his airway opened up.

"Grab two forks," I told Leonard, and showed him how to hold the edges of the incision apart. He did it—cool as a cuke. His hands didn't even shake.

Mine did. The trachea lay unusually deep in this guy's porky neck; I had to dig for it. The ambulance screamed up outside and the paramedics tramped in as I finally cut through the cartilage ring and shoved in the tracheotomy tube from my bag.

The guy took a wheezy, shuddering breath and coughed a wad of blood onto my shirt. His purple complexion paled to crimson, and then to pink. Leonard listened as I briefed the ambulance techs. Then we went to wash our hands.

Leonard scrubbed studiously at the men's-room sink. "You didn't have to do that," he said.

"Sure I did. I couldn't just let him die."

He caught my eye in the mirror. "You didn't like him. I could tell you didn't."

"No." I tore a towel off the roller. "No, I didn't like him. But it's not the thought that counts, Leonard. In this world, it's the action that counts."

He winced, a covered-up stab of visceral pain, and I was sorry for saying that and sorrier still for what he'd betrayed. But I was sorriest of all for him because he looked just as guilty as hell about something, and if he had killed Maisie somehow, it would come out sooner or later. I didn't like thinking about what might happen then.

Neither of us felt like finishing dinner. I went back for the check and found it was taken care of. Bad business to have folks dying in the middle of the dinner rush. While I assured the manager that we certainly would come back another time, I spied something under Leonard's chair.

It was a stamped silver locket I recognized. Maisie and I had had a conversation about it, years ago. I had wanted her to remove it while she had some X-rays; she said she would take it off when she was dead, and to hell with me.

Now Leonard had it, and that added one more cipher to the sum of what I understood about him.

He had already gone outside. I took a shortcut through the barroom, to catch up with him.

Perry Weems, the bartender, was there as usual, pouring skimpy shots. Disco boomed out of the jukebox. I'd spent enough time here to make it familiar, just after Lee and the kids died when guilt and loneliness drove me out night after night. Here I'd sat, drinking alone in one of the black leatherette booths. Here I'd examined my conscience until it was little more than a raw, bleeding nub: I shouldn't have shouted at her. I ought to have had the brakes checked. I could have done bet-

ter, loved more, saved them.

Now the memory depressed me and I wished I'd avoided the bar. As I passed the booths, hurrying toward the exit, a familiar whine cut through the din of laughter and music. It came from the last booth.

"Come on, Paulie. I'll get it to ya. I swear, Paulie, my old lady is gonna have bucks."

Weasel Bodine's voice sounded half drunk and all the way desperate. His companion didn't seem impressed.

"Weasel, you're full of it. You don't know when the broad's gonna get the dough. You ain't married her yet. And you don't know she'll give it to you even when you do marry her."

I drew abreast of the booth, glancing sideways. Weasel, hunched over the table, gripped a small glass of beer in both hands.

Paulie was older, heavier, meaner looking. His gold ear stud glimmered in the dim light and the scars on his knuckles showed jagged, fishbelly-pale among the dark hairs. His eyes had all the warmth of a pair of ball-bearings. He was not a local product, and if Weasel owed him money then I pitied Weasel.

"She'll get it," Weasel said. "And I'll get it. I promise you that."

Whoever she was, I pitied her

too. Then I was outside, gratefully leaving all three with my memories in the bar.

I caught up with Leonard and we crossed the twilit parking lot together. The heat was easing off a little, but the softened asphalt sucked gently at the soles of our shoes as we walked.

"You've got a hole in your pocket," I told him, and held the medal out.

He jammed his hands into his pockets, feeling around; the stricken expression on his face changed to relief. One hand remained in his pocket and the other reached out eagerly.

"Thanks. Janet would have just sold it or something. I only wanted it to . . . remember her by."

I thought life would be a good deal better if people remembered less, but I didn't say so.

"You loved her, then," I said as we pulled out of the lot.

"Sure I did." The medal glinted dully in the dashboard lights. "She got mad at me sometimes, but it was my fault. I didn't try hard enough."

"At what?"

He shrugged. "You know. Friends and stuff. I got in trouble at school, like with Mr. Potter. I wasn't normal. It made her cr—I mean, it made her mad."

I showed him his room when we got home, and then sat in

the living room listening to the floorboards creak with the unaccustomed pressure of another person in the house. He didn't want to watch television but said he would lie on his bed and read. That was fine with me, and I tried to read for a while, too. But the feeling that I was being inhospitable got the better of me.

Some stubborn resistance has always kept me from buying an air conditioner. The night was muggy, and I thought I would tell Leonard he could sleep in the screenhouse if he liked. The door at the end of the carpeted hall was ajar, and I tapped it, then went in.

He stood at the window, clad only in shorts, and whirled when he heard me. But not quickly enough.

"It doesn't hurt," he said. "Honest, it's okay."

"Like hell." His back was a hash of cuts, inflamed and weeping. The lump on his right shoulder was the calcium spur of an old, unset fracture. A little dent marred his fifth thoracic vertebra.

"Drop 'em," I said. He complied reluctantly, and I understood why he wouldn't go out for sports. No locker-room high-jinks for Lennie; he quite literally had to keep his ass covered. I wondered how he had managed gym class so far, how

he'd kept anybody from seeing the little round scars that peppered his butt. It was perfectly obvious what they were—obvious, that is, to anyone whose mind would admit the possibility.

They were old cigarette burns.

I dressed his back with Bacitracin and took him downstairs. I poured myself a stiff scotch and gave him a snifter of brandy, which he eyed doubtfully.

"Doctor's orders," I said. He took an obedient gulp, making a face when it hit him. Then he took another.

Bit by bit I got the story out of him: beatings, burnings. He whispered, staring at the floor. The worst part was his look of shame, as if he had somehow done those things to himself.

"When I got older, things got better," he said. "Last summer she boxed my ears—broke my eardrum. Since then, just the usual."

Just the usual. It was a moment before I could trust myself to speak.

"And then what happened?"

"Yesterday . . . I broke a cup. I hid it, but she found out. So she punished me. With a switch from the willow tree."

"And last night?"

He looked at me. He knew what I was asking.

"Wanda came," he said,

meaning the practical nurse, Wanda Prouty. "She always fixed Aunt Maisie hot milk. She told me to watch it, not to let it boil. I'd taken the capsules out of her bottle one at a time over a couple of months, so I had a lot of them. About fifteen. I put them in the milk, emptied them in, and when Wanda came back she took it and gave it to Aunt Maisie. When Wanda came back again, she had the empty cup, so I knew I'd really done it. And this morning, Aunt Maisie was dead."

By now his voice was barely audible. "Are you going to call the police now?"

I shook my head.

"Why not?"

"Because," I told him, "I'm the grownup here and you're the kid, and I make the decisions. Is that okay with you?"

The relief in his face came from more than escaping jail, or whatever he was imagining, for the night. He'd needed a grownup very badly for ten years, and now he'd found one. No doubt he thought I knew just what to do.

Sure. Sure I did.

"Leonard, I'm going to give you some advice now. Will you take it?"

He nodded. Of course he would. I was treating him kindly, and he would have tried to walk on water if I'd asked him to.

I pointed at his glass. "Drink that. All of it."

He made a horrendous face and gulped the rest of the brandy.

"Now. Go upstairs and get into bed. Have a good cry, if you need to. Then go to sleep. Tomorrow we'll talk about what to do."

He set down his glass and left the room; a few moments later his footsteps moved across the floorboards of the upstairs bedroom. A little while later I went upstairs, too.

I took off my shirt, turned around, and looked over my shoulder into the mirror on my closet door. The marks on my back had faded with time. The memories hadn't.

I hadn't asked Leonard the obvious question: why he'd never asked for help, or run away. I knew the answer too well.

The child's world is built on such cruel justice. The more he is hurt, the more he thinks he deserves it. Punishment implies guilt. Leonard hadn't been able to admit to anyone that he'd been that bad.

Another drink and a good cry: it was such good advice that I took it myself. But I couldn't sleep, and I didn't have a grownup to go talk to.

Sometime in the night, Leonard padded down to the bathroom, ran a glass of water, and

went back to bed. After that I did sleep, and it wasn't until light crept around the edges of the shades that I jerked awake, full of a clear and hideous certainty about why Leonard had wanted that glass of water, and what else had been in his pockets.

I got out of bed and pulled on my robe, moving slowly, not wanting to find what I was sure I must find. I held my breath as I went down the hall and opened the door to Leonard's room.

He lay on the bed. The sheet rose and fell with his regular breaths, and I let out my own.

On the bedside table, lined up in two neat rows, were twenty Dalmane capsules. I had last seen them in Maisie's pill bottle. Beside them, Leonard's glass of water stood untouched.

I understood: he had believed me. Against all the odds, he had trusted me to help him. Where he found that faith I had absolutely no idea, but I went downstairs determined to make good on it.

I would tell Howard Hansen that I had decided to do the autopsy myself, I decided, and then I would fake it. I would find some way to bury Leonard's crime.

The telephone rang as I reached for it.

"Price? This is Howard. Listen, I've got that Innes wo-

man's autopsy all done for you."

"I thought you were going to take your kids to the ball game, Howard," I said dully. If Howard had done the post-mortem, he'd found the pills—remains in her stomach, or barbiturate levels in her blood.

"I did," Howard said. "Great game. But I've got a busy day today; so I came back here last night and did the deed for you. Then just as I got done we got a stinker of a car wreck—no rest for the wicked, hey?"

"Really," I said, fighting to keep puzzlement out of my voice. I'd never known Howard to be slipshod. But he wasn't saying anything about pills.

"Anyway," he went on, "I sent her back to Willard. Heart failure, like you thought. That woman had a ticker like wet Kleenex—amazing she lasted as long as she did."

I sat down, wobbling with relief.

"Not like this other one," Howard continued. He liked to talk about his work. "Maybe you knew her, Wanda Prouty?"

I sat up alertly.

"Took a load of pills," Howard said, "and ran her car off Highway 16 a couple of nights ago. Went into the pond, nobody noticed it until last night, some kids had a party out there and found it. Booze and pills—wouldn't you think a nurse

would know better? She was no looker when she was alive, but now I'll tell you—"

"Sounds pretty gruesome," I said. Howard's voice seemed to come from a distance. A new possibility was dawning on me, one I supposed I would never be sure of. But it was a chance. I thanked Howard and hung up.

As far as I was concerned, Leonard was off the hook. No matter what he had done, it didn't seem that Maisie could die from pills she'd never taken. But before I spoke with him, I had to check one thing.

I called Rose Flores, hoping she'd updated her stock of town gossip.

She had.

"Did you know that Wanda was going to get married?"

Leonard sat at the kitchen table. Yes, he had known; she was going to marry Mr. Bodine, and his aunt had been very angry about it.

"Did they talk about it that last night?"

Leonard nodded. "Aunt Maisie said she wasn't going to give Wanda the thousand dollars. She said it would all go to that good-for-nothing if she did, and she was going to make a new will for real this time, down at the lawyer's."

"Then what happened?"

Leonard shrugged. "Just what I told you before. Wanda came and got the milk, and then she took it to Aunt Maisie. Then she came back with the glass."

"They were still arguing?"

Leonard shook his head. "By then they weren't speaking to each other."

"Did you hear your aunt speak at all after Wanda went in with the glass of milk?"

"No. The last thing she said was a couple of minutes before Wanda came out for it. She said, 'Don't think I'll change my mind, either, you ungrateful slut.' She called Wanda a slut. But I still don't see—oh, I get it."

A little hope came into his eyes.

"That's right," I told him. "I think Wanda wanted that thousand dollars very much. She meant to have it." Because, I thought, Weasel would make her very sorry if she didn't get it. "I think she drank the milk," I went on, "to make it look as if your aunt was still alive. Probably she'd already smothered her—your aunt's weak heart would make that easy to do."

"That means I didn't kill Aunt Maisie," Leonard began. Then his face fell. "I killed Wanda instead."

"No. Wanda killed herself, with an overdose of greed. She

only drank the milk because she was a murderer."

He frowned. "But I put the pills in. You said it was the action that counts—I'm in this, somehow."

I sat down across from him at the table. He was right. He was in it somehow, and so was Maisie with her cruelty, Weasel with his greed, Wanda with her desire to marry and her fear of a beating, her fingers clutched round the only dowry she had. I was in it, too. We were all in it.

"Leonard," I said, "it's so easy to look back and see where you went wrong. But it doesn't help anything. Only going forward helps."

He looked up at me with the beginnings of painful comprehension in his eyes. "I can't fix it, can I? I can never go back."

"No. You can't. You can only try to do better, to learn and go on."

He nodded and then seemed abruptly to change the subject.

"Did you have kids once?"

"Yes, I did." I stood up, uneasy. He must have seen their toys in the closet.

"Well, do you miss them?"

I swallowed hard. "Yes. Yes, I do."

"And they aren't coming back?" he persisted.

"No, they aren't coming back. They're dead. Why?"

"Because," he said. "I need to know."

I understood then. He was figuring my loss, my hurt, measuring it against his own. He needed badly to know that people could survive such feelings.

"It's hard," I said softly. "But you can handle it."

After a moment he got up from his chair and put his arms around me. We two men stood there by the kitchen table and cried for a while.

"Okay," he said resignedly into my shoulder when he had finished sobbing.

I didn't really think it was, but I thought it could be. Thought so; in fact, for the first time in a very long while.

"It is," I said. "It's going to be okay."

I meant it as a promise, one I intended to keep.

For both our sakes.

FICTION

For the Taking

by Sam Pizzo

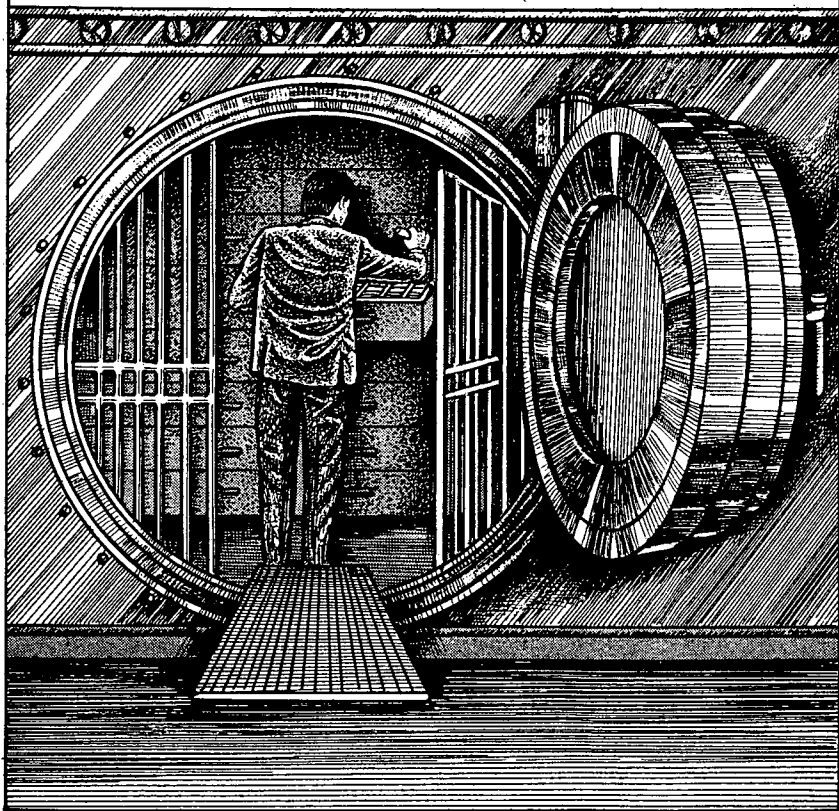


Illustration by Peter D. Fasolino

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Nobody was using the desk and nobody was watching, so Lester sat down. He just wanted to get a feel for what it would be like to work in a bank. If discovered, he would leave quietly and with dignity.

The desk was precisely the one he would want if he worked in a bank, not pretentious like the president's desk, but a handsome beige and made of sturdy steel. A working desk. He swept his hand over its top and down its steel-skirted side resisting an impulse to pat it affectionately.

Lester watched as tellers flirted with customers and counted money with a snap. He was certain they never made a mistake. The clatter of the typewriters and the clicking of the adding machines made him tremble at the thought of using one. The secretaries were crisp and efficient, as he expected them to be, and the junior executives spoke with boldness and authority. All was as it should be.

Lester's desk was midway between the Loan Department and New Accounts. If the people in the Loan Department noticed him, they thought he was in New Accounts. If the people in New Accounts noticed him, they thought he was in the Loan Department. And Lester fidgeted, crossing and uncrossing his legs trying to appear nonchalant, even bored.

Then his phone rang—at least he thought it rang—so he answered it. His Hello! sounded to him like an explosion. Surely everyone in the bank would be glaring at him. He raised his head slowly, peeping from under the bill of his cap. Nobody was watching! Business as usual! Lester cradled the phone on his shoulder and rocked back in his chair, pretending to loft thunderheads of blue cigar smoke into the atmosphere. Yes, J.B., Mama and Uncle George were okay. Lester despised idle conversation during banking hours. He continued with an air of exhausted patience. Yes, J.B., the golf game was fine. And, no, J.B., the party was a bore.

At last the idle chatter was out of the way. We need new blood in this bank, J.B. I'm going to hire the handsome young man. The one who likes the beige desk. The one with the cigar. A real comer, J.B., an asset to the team. My best to the little woman!

Hanging up sharply, Lester examined the shallow middle drawer of his desk and found it a jumble of pencils, pens, erasers, rulers, and clips, which he arranged and separated in neat little compartments. The drawers on the left were brimming with forms which he examined with a kind of reverence. And the drawers on

the right were not drawers at all, but a door that swung open; and in the innards of his desk was a shiny typewriter which, when tugged, slid out and up into a workable position.

Lester typed out generous loans to relatives and acquaintances, foreclosed delinquent mortgages, wrote scathing letters to congressmen, and dashed off memos to the staff.

Then he saw her—the File Girl! The first thing that attracted his attention was her chewing gum, the way she chewed it. She rolled it with her tongue and when she bit down, it made a triple snap, the snap in the middle being louder than the first and third. What a talent! And she gave the sound extra volume by scooting her mouth to the side, exposing the molars that did the work. It made her appear a dab unrefined, but it didn't detract from her good looks.

She was graceful though plump, maneuvering the aisles with a sidestep here and a sashay there, dropping off and picking up files while hugging those that remained to her—you know!

Lester devoured her with his eyes as she worked her way from desk to desk. He wanted to give her a glimpse of his left profile—the one with the dimple—but there was no time. She was coming right at him. SnapSNAPsnap! He squinched his eyes and opened them wishing he could shut one eye like his Aunt Harriet's third husband.

Hi, doll, is what he wanted to say, but the words strangled in his throat and his mouth froze in a silent oh.

She breezed by, extending her arm so that the back of her hand was about six inches from his nose, and she pointed straight up with her middle finger, which he interpreted as a symbolic gesture of unity, of oneness. Lester was ecstatic. He wanted to raise his finger to her. It was too late. She was gone.

Lester followed her at a discreet distance past the employee lounge, past the restrooms, and down a flight of stairs to the file room in the basement.

She was resting on a chair with her head in the dumbwaiter shaft, lighting up a pointy cigarette. The poor thing couldn't afford tailor-mades, so she rolled her own—probably scrimping to support an invalid mother. She took a deep breath and held it. His heart cried out to do something nice for her. Not knowing the price of a pack of tailor-mades, he pressed a dime in her hand and upped his middle finger. Now she knew the feeling was mutual.

Her face reddened, her eyes narrowed to slits and the veins in

her neck looked explosive. Lester had never had that effect on a woman before. Moving quickly to her side, he smacked her sharply between the shoulder blades and (thank God!) she started breathing again. Lester doffed his cap and ambled off with what he hoped was humility.

When Lester returned to his desk, somebody was sitting in it. Without breaking stride, he made a U-turn and headed for the men's room where he locked himself in the last stall. He was not one to make a scene. When his desk was empty, he would return to it. In the meantime, he conducted business from the last stall, jotting notes and writing memos on the tear-away paper scroll. This new location would be his temporary private office. He was patient. He would wait.

At five o'clock he washed his hands and went home.

The next day the person at his desk appeared more entrenched than ever. Lester raised his foot three times and almost stomped it on the floor. He inhaled enormous quantities of air and expelled it through his nose. His temporary private office was damp, cold, and lacking a view. His seat was uncomfortable, with inadequate back support. He longed to see the File Girl again. To chat with her . . . court her properly. But what would he say, that he had been discarded like an old money bag?

Well, two could play that game! When nobody was looking, Lester tilted paintings on the walls, mashed the points of pens set out for customer use, unplugged the coffee pot at mid-perk, and made long black heel marks on the polished floors.

The final outrage came when somebody used his temporary private office without permission. There were cigarette ashes and newspapers on the floor, and a grotesque mustache had been drawn on his picture of James Bond.

That did it! He had had it up to here. Lester marched out of his temporary private office, up the hall, across the floor of the bank to the vault where he scooped up a roll of nickels and stomped out the door.

When he reached the sidewalk, he ran north then south, east then west, his feet patting and slapping the concrete while he skittered in circles. With great effort, he placed one foot in front of the other until he was walking normally. The roll of nickels clenched in his fist reminded him of his plight and he burst into a run.

After a few blocks he stopped. Drat that war injury! Lester wished

he had never volunteered to fly that helicopter rescue mission when he was shot down over the jungles of Bocambia. Besides, he was gasping for breath and he had a sideache.

And his conscience started bothering him. All his life he had been trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. Now he had blown it. He felt terrible. He slumped to the curb and waited for the police to haul him away, hoping they would make a spectacle of him as a deterrent to crime.

The police did not come. He made himself more visible by standing up and scowling. Still no arrest. He waved at a patrol car going by and the officers waved back.

Lester knew what he had to do. Turn himself in. But first he had to see the File Girl. He had to be the one to tell her. He wanted it that way. And she would want it that way, to hear it from the lips of the man she loved.

Lester returned to the bank. He found her in the basement smoking another pointy cigarette. The poor dear looked tired and dazed.

As he approached, she stood up and walked into the wall. To make her feel at ease, he strolled into the file cabinets. Her eyes were puffy and red, one staring straight ahead while the other appeared to be watching a butterfly in flight. Oh, how he wished they had met last summer when he was an almost-counselor at Camp Wee Winee Tonga. He told her that he was turning himself in, going up the river. He liked that phrase and repeated it, up the river. He hoped she would wait for him, and he would appreciate it if she sent cookies—Fig Newtons would do.

Lester explained that on his honor he had always done his best to do his duty to God and his Country, and to obey the Law; to help others at all times; to keep himself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight. He didn't know where he'd gone wrong. He'd had a happy childhood, except for the time he was frightened by a dog when visiting his cousin in Plainfield. He regretted not having met her invalid mother, and please don't tell her he was going to jail—just say he was going far, far away.

Slipping two nickels from the roll, he pressed them into her palm. Without looking back, he groped his way to the sidewalk with tear-filled eyes.

Lester shuffled through the dimly-lit hallways of the police station until he found the Criminal Division. He surrendered to the

sergeant, a giant of a man with a cannon-sized pistol on his hip, blurting that he was the bank robber, that he waved at the patrol car and the officers waved back, and that two of the nickels were missing because he didn't want her smoking the unfiltered kind. He was ready to pay for his crime and he begged for mercy.

The sergeant smiled and slipped the roll of nickels into his own pocket. He assured Lester that confessing was the right thing to do because honesty was the best policy. He told Lester to get up off his knees, he was forgiven, and he should go home.

That was it? No bread and water? No up the river? If the sergeant didn't mind, he would like to go to jail for a little while. He was expecting a package of cookies. Of course, the cookies could be forwarded to his home, couldn't they? Then he wouldn't have to go to jail at all, would he?

Lester's faith in the police had been restored, and he marveled at the swiftness of the American Judicial System. Justice and Mercy had triumphed! He thanked the sergeant for the kind of treatment he had received, and he promised to remember it in the next election when he voted for sergeant.

With his head high and a resolve never to rob another bank, Lester left the Criminal Division. The hallways seemed brighter and more cheerful than when he came in. He skipped past the elevators, stopping for a moment to peek into the chief's office. He saw a desk. Nobody was using it and nobody was watching, so he sat down.

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Arthur Tress

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The winning entry for the June Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

The Second Mrs. Porter



She opened her eyes and didn't know where she was. The word "orientation" swam into her mind. "That's it," she thought. "I am very, very comfortable, but I am not oriented." The shortcoming did not seem important to her. She was wrapped in a beautiful peace, a consciousness of well-being that was intoxicating. The light blue robe

that invested her shoulders, the delicately striped afghan that covered her knees were airy miracles; the narrow hands that lay in her lap were smooth and pink-tipped. She flexed them, enjoying the smooth response of the muscles. "What wonderful hands," she thought, surprised, pleased. They were as strange to her as everything else.



by Melba Marlett

Drowsily she studied the handsome room. It seemed to be a kind of bed-sitting room, furnished in muted blues and greens, with everything precisely placed. Her eyes traversed it slowly, lingering on the pretty bed against the far wall, on the enchanting little boudoir chair, on the bowl of ruffled white flowers—were they sweet peas?—was there a flower called

that?—on the low table, on the mirror whose reflection doubled the size of the room and showed her a woman in a light blue robe, lying on a chaise longue by a wide window. She knew at once that she was looking at herself, but she had no feelings of recognition, nor any great interest in the matter. She turned her head, without raising it, toward the window.

Through the thin white curtain she looked at a wide green lawn, enlivened with petunia beds, marked with tall accents of cypress and oak. The sunshine had a late-afternoon slant to it. Odd to have bars on a window that gave on such a handsome view.

When she woke again, it was evening, and she was in bed. Across the room, in lamplight now, she saw the chaise longue, the afghan neatly folded at its foot. A woman dressed in white was stacking dishes on a tray, her back to the bed.

Her mind supplied the word she should use. "Nurse," she said.

The woman turned around so sharply that the dishes clattered. Then her face smoothed and she approached the bed. "Well, Mrs. Porter," she said. "I'm glad you're so much better this evening. Is there anything I can get for you?"

She had a feeling that she should be very careful. The dishes gave her an inspiration. "I'm hungry," she said.

"I'm not surprised. You had very little supper. What would you like?"

Of course, she had not had supper at all. She would have remembered eating supper. Careful, careful. "Some ice cream? Perhaps some tea?" She hadn't the faintest notion of

what either thing was. They were only words that had come into her head.

The nurse smiled and picked up the tray. "I'll bring them right away." The door swished shut behind her.

She wanted nothing more than to stay right where she was and enjoy the room in solitude, but she had a presentiment of trickery that made her slide from the bed and circle the room, looking for—well, anything that would give her an advantage in the guessing game. They were trying to make her believe she was in a hospital, though this room, with its bars at the windows, was not like her concept of hospital. (Funny how she knew some things without knowing how she knew them. It was the important things she *didn't* know that she must discover.) They wanted her to think she was sick, though there could not be another person on earth who had such a feeling of health. They said she was Mrs. Porter, but she didn't recognize the name.

As if on command she opened a dresser drawer and it was full of letters. They were addressed to Mrs. Robert W. Porter, Women's Memorial Hospital, and each one had been neatly slit open, its contents not so neatly put back. (She nearly laughed. I suppose they'll try to

tell me I've read every one, she thought.) Quickly she slid several of them out of their envelopes, just far enough to see the opening lines. "Dear Ellen," they began. And "Darling Ellen" and "My poor Ellen." The dates ranged wildly through different months of different years. She put them back precisely and closed the drawer. If this was part of the scheme to convince her that she was Mrs. Porter, what a lot of trouble they had gone to, with those variegated scripts and writing papers. I suppose there is a Mrs. Porter somewhere, she thought, climbing back into bed.

The minute she saw the tray, she recognized both ice cream and tea (how could she have forgotten?) and began to consume them, daintily, to make them last longer. Their deliciousness absorbed her completely, as if they were the first food she had ever eaten.

When she looked up, a tall man in a gray suit was standing beside the nurse.

"I'm your doctor," he said. "Dr. Lindsay. Remember me?"

"Yes," she said, falsely. "How are you?"

"The point is, how are *you*? Mrs. O'Hara called me and I came right down. What about your vision? Can you see me quite clearly?"

If you only knew, she thought,

how *very* clearly I can see you, with the excitement in your eyes and voice and the significant little looks you and Mrs. O'Hara are exchanging. "Certainly," she said.

"No blurring? No double vision?" He took a small silver tube from his pocket. "I'm going to shine this little light in your eyes. It'll take only a few minutes. It won't hurt you."

The light shining into one eye did not preclude the vision of the other. Through it, she studied the texture of his skin and guessed his age to be forty. Younger than herself; the woman she had seen in the mirror must be at least forty-five. "You have reddish whiskers, Dr. Lindsay," she said.

He snapped off the light and stepped back. "Haven't shaved since this morning. Do you know your name?"

"My name is Ellen Porter," she said. "I'm in Women's Memorial Hospital. I think I have been here for a long time." It was the right thing to have said. She heard the intake of his breath.

"And Mrs. O'Hara, here. Do you know her?"

Something hinged on this answer. The electricity in the room tingled along her nerves. "I'm sorry," she said. "I don't know Mrs. O'Hara."

"Of course you don't," he said,

triumphantly. "She's brand new. Just came on this evening." He turned to the nurse. "Well, Mrs. O'Hara, you're a miracle worker. Now if you two girls will just settle down for tonight, I'll see Mrs. Porter the first thing in the morning. The nurses have been telling me that they find that chaise comfortable for napping, and I don't believe Mrs. Porter will be requiring much attention."

It was time to take a giant step. "I won't be requiring anything at all tonight," Ellen said. "Is there any other place where Mrs. O'Hara could sleep?" She made appealing gestures against their consternation. "It seems to be that I've been with people forever. It would be so—normal, to have my room to myself."

The word "normal" turned the tide. Yes, Mrs. O'Hara could be elsewhere, close at hand, for frequent checks. The night light in the bathroom could be left on. And yes, certainly, she could have more ice cream for breakfast. The request pleased them inordinately. They went away smiling.

Most of that night she spent in the bathroom, reading the letters from the drawer, one by one under the night light, with the bathroom door closed. Periodically she returned to her bed, to act the perfectly sleep-

ing patient. If Mrs. O'Hara did surprise her, it would be in a normal situation, and she would at once flush the letter away. But Mrs. O'Hara came at only the right intervals.

By the time her table clock said three, she was back in bed, thinking hard about Ellen Porter. The woman was incomprehensible to her, to anyone with common sense. Mrs. Porter, it seemed, was a woman of great wealth who spent her time in litigation and in giving offense. Her husband, Robert, from whom she had been estranged—no mention of divorce, however—had been injured in an automobile accident. Her remaining family consisted of some distant cousins, who appeared to have hopes of becoming her heirs. There were references to the unsatisfactory behavior of a Mr. Arthur Crandall, who was Mrs. Porter's attorney and made of the same kind of stone as she was. Over and over the letters said, "You have so much, we have so little." Sue's education—therapy for Tony—subsistence for an aging great-aunt. Small requests, really, to make of a woman who had millions. Most expressed a perfunctory hope for her better health, but one, signed Gregory Porter, was belligerent: "You can hide in that hospital till

Hell freezes over, but we'll get you into court the minute you leave. You have never fulfilled your father's promises to us, though we signed those papers on the strength of them and in good faith. Robert says that he is willing to settle; but that he can't prevail upon you. Five years, or ten, the going gets tougher, but we can wait. How does it feel to know that so many people wish you were dead?"

Well, Mrs. Porter *was* dead, or would they have dared to give her name to a stranger? (If only I knew my real name, she thought, I suppose it's some medicine they give me.) But Mrs. Porter must also be made to seem alive for some reason, so a conspiracy was being engineered to that end, and somehow she had become involved in it, an empty-headed puppet on God-knew-whose strings. I have to play along, she thought, because I don't know what else to do; but somewhere along the way I'll escape them, if I'm very patient and very clever.

The game was to learn from them while they thought they were learning from her, and she found it easy for two reasons. First, Dr. Lindsay and the staff seemed to want her to set her own pace in "remembering," as

they called it; and, second, her senses remained magnificently acute, so that in the faces and voices of the people around her she caught the smallest and most fleeting changes. Watching their souls move behind their eyes gave her the clues to what they wanted her to say.

She learned to be bold on occasion. "Why don't I have visitors?" she asked Dr. Lindsay after a month of their daily interviews. "I should think that Mr. Crandall might have come by now. Or Robert."

Plain as day was the astonishment behind the professional mask. "Do you *want* to see your husband?"

"Of course," she said, promptly. "I realize that we weren't on the best of terms, but still—has he recovered from the accident?"

The jolt of that threw him against the back of his chair, but he kept his voice calm. "Yes, he's recovered. What do you remember about—the accident?"

"Nothing, really. Only that there was one. When did it happen?"

"Five years ago."

"As long as that?" She rubbed her forehead so that she could study him between her fingers. "Was I—in it? Is that what brought me here?"

His face was all confirma-

tion, though he averted his eyes. "Don't worry about it. You're coming along so well. No use to force these things. That's why we're not allowing you visitors until a little later."

She smiled at him. "That makes me feel better. I know I wasn't one of the world's most popular women, but I did think *somebody* ought to come by."

"They'll come as soon as we let them."

"And write as soon as you let them?"

He made a note on the chart before him. "I have no objection to letters. We screen them, you see, so if there's anything too troublesome, we can protect you from it."

"Oh. You read them first?"

"Yes. Every letter that comes in is pre-read by staff. Don't mind the inked-out sections. They're for your own good."

But there had been no inked-out sections at all in the neatly-opened letters she had read that first night and which, without notice or explanation, had disappeared from the dresser drawer by the next time she opened it. Had they decided those letters were a mistake? And how could they let her have visitors when the very first one would see that the woman who was supposed to be Ellen Porter was really no such person?

Serious as her predicament might be, she found she could not worry about it with any consistency. Life was marvelously pleasant, now that she was "fully ambulatory." The private nurses, with their professional nosiness, were removed; and, with the coming of Wally West, she was given the beatific freedom of the hospital grounds.

Wally was a tall, spidery eighteen-year-old with a shimmering mind and the composure of a saint. He was a senior at the high school in Northfield, the little town whose church steeples were visible down in the valley, and he was employed by the hospital, late afternoons, as a Walker.

"More like a Tagger-Along-er," Wally said. "You just walk where you want to, and I tag along. If you want to talk, we talk. If you don't want to, I keep quiet. The thing is, don't worry about talking. I always have plenty to think about."

At first she was content just to walk, miles a day, over the meadows and woodland that belonged to the hospital. Then Wally began to insist that she sit down every now and then.

"Dr. Lindsay says you're losing too much weight," he said. "Let's sit on this bench and watch the squirrels."

"And talk," she said, agreeably.

"Okay. But I better tell you that the doctor gets a written report from me about you, once a week. I have an agreement with him that I can tell my patients that. Don't want to go around feeling like a Judas or something."

"That's all right. I have nothing to hide."

"I told 'em that already. I said to Dr. Lindsay, 'Mrs. Porter's getting so well, she doesn't need me.' But he says to keep on anyway."

"And I say so, too." The October air was marvelous, and she raised her face to it. "I don't *feel* ill, you know. I'm not even sure what's supposed to be wrong with me."

"Well, plenty *was*. When I first came to work here, more than a year ago, they told me they'd inherited you from some other hospital. You were just a bundle in a chair—you know, like a vegetable—didn't talk or see or hear. The nurses got you up and dressed you, and walked you, and put you to bed again, and you weren't *with* it. Now, well, you're a miracle. You don't even look like yourself. I'd never recognize you as the same woman."

"Did you see me close up, Wally? Did you come right up and look into my face? Surely I'd remember that."

"No, I just saw you from a

distance, being trundled around. You looked like this." He slid down limply on the bench, pushed his hair over his eyes, let his head and jaw go slack. "Strictly nobody home. The sickest person in the whole hospital." He slid upright again. "I wrote a composition about you for my English class. Didn't use your name, of course, that wouldn't have been right. I called it 'The Woman Who Went Away.' Got an A on it, too."

"I'd like to read it. Could I?"

"If Dr. Lindsay says so. I'll ask him."

"Don't." The word was too impulsive and she hastened to lighten it. "It's good policy to let sleeping doctors lie."

"I couldn't let you see it without his permission, Mrs. Porter. Something in it might set you back, it takes a psychiatrist to know."

She reached over and patted his hand. "That's all right, Wally. Don't worry about it."

By September, she knew every path and twig on the hospital's back acreage. Her favorite spot was a little curving abandoned garden, where re-seeded pansies and poppies struggled with a heavy invasion of weeds. "Wonder why they let this go?" she said to Wally. "It must have been very pretty once, and you can see half the country from up here."

"What I like about it is that it has *benches*. What do you say we sit for a few minutes?"

"You sit, and I'll—I'll *weed*."

It was a happy inspiration. Besides the kneeling and pulling that stretched her muscles and warmed her blood, there was the pleasure of seeing a design unfold. Here there had been a big clump of bleeding-heart, and here had been—was it foxglove? And over everything were the weeds, vigorous and furiously stubborn.

Day after day she struggled with them, panting with determination. Some had surface roots and came away easily, but, if she didn't get every scrap of them, they regrew, almost overnight. Others had roots that went down a foot, and all of them reappeared at a moment's notice.

"I'm getting to be an expert on weeds," she said to Wally. "They're fascinating in a curious kind of way. Sometimes I dream about them at night. Sort of a nightmare, where I keep pulling and pulling, and the weeds just stay as thick as ever! I wish I had a book about them. Maybe there's one in the hospital library."

"Well, you're making an impression here," said Wally, grinning. "Only three weeks' work and you've cleared a space at least two feet square. Did

you always like to garden?"

"Yes," she said, firmly, wondering if it were true.

"Then maybe you have some gardening books at home, and Dr. Lindsay could have them brought for you."

"Of course," she said, smoothly. "I wonder why I didn't think of that myself. You know, next Monday I'm going to start right in the middle there, where it's thickest. Maybe, just maybe, it was planted in a clock pattern, and the middle ought to tell me."

The very next day, at their morning session, she broached the subject to Dr. Lindsay. "Are there any books about weeds? I'd like some."

"Wally says you're really going after them. I've been asking around, and nobody seems to know anything about your weeded-over garden. Must have been part of the original planting, forty years ago. It might show up on an old landscaping map, if I could find one." He had noticed her hands, and he was shocked. "My God, Mrs. Porter, the least you can do is wear gloves when you go digging! I can't have people thinking you take care of our grounds single-handed! And, yes, I'll see that you get some gardening books."

"I need some different clothes, too," she said. "Nothing in my closet really fits me any more.

I'm a different shape than I used to be. My waistline's the same, but I'm rounder above and below it."

"We'll get one of the nurses to take you down to the village to shop—and maybe to help you research weeds in the Carnegie library there. How will that suit you?" He leaned across and handed her a typewritten page. "This is from Mr. Crandall, came yesterday. It's not much more than a request to come and see you." His eyes were so intent upon her that she had to look away to keep from laughing. "I'm going to have to let him come, I suppose. He's a member of the trust that's been handling your affairs while you've been with us."

"I know that he's my lawyer," she said, casually. "I didn't know about the trust." She folded the letter and put it back on his desk. "Is Robert a member of the trust, too?"

"I don't think so. Perhaps they ask his advice, I wouldn't know. Considering that the two of you weren't on good enough terms at the time of the accident to be living together, the court decided to—"

"If we weren't living together, how did we come to be in that car together?"

"That's what the police wanted to know. There was quite an investigation, partic-

ularly when it looked as if you weren't going to live. But then you began to recover—"

She laughed. "A vegetable in a chair! How encouraged they all must have been!"

"Believe me, Mrs. Porter, it took medical miracles to get you even as far as the vegetable stage." He leaned back in his chair and smiled at her. "Don't bother to pretend that you remember anything from that earlier period. There was neurological damage that had to be repaired. You could not possibly recall anything from that first six months after the accident."

She tried to look prettily indignant. "Pretend? Why should I pretend?"

"I'm not sure. I have the feeling, off and on, that you're playing games with me. Please don't do it."

And I have the feeling that you're playing games with *me*, she thought swiftly, and that the name of today's little game is Get Her to Confide in You. "Dear Dr. Lindsay," she said, appealingly, "it's only that I like to please you. I'm not treacherous, only feminine. Sometimes I think I know what you want me to say, so I say it!"

"Whether it's true or not?"

"Well, after I say it, it always *seems* true."

He shook his head. "We'll

never get you put back together that way."

"I'm not sure I want to be put back together," she said, daringly. "I wasn't as nice a person then as I am now."

That surprised him, but he rallied. "'Healthy' and 'nice' aren't always the same thing, Mrs. Porter, and it's 'healthy' we're trying for. The more honest you try to be, the more quickly I can let you leave here."

The leap of hope in her heart surprised her by its strength. "Should I want to leave here?"

"Yes."

"And I'm not healthy enough now?"

"No. There's something—well, I'm not satisfied with your adjustment. You've been through a dreadful ordeal—pain, surgery, a long invalidism, partial rebuilding of your face, loss of memory—and none of it seems to have touched you at all. This indicates a lack of realization that is, well, worrisome."

For the first time she was convinced that he was a completely honest man, and she nearly told him the whole story. How Ellen Porter must be dead or in hiding, and that she (infuriatingly nameless) had somehow been substituted, and that no one had supposed she would recover enough (from whatever had been done to her)

to know the difference, but that somehow she had. And, just as swiftly, she saw that it would be wrong to involve this young doctor by alerting him. As long as they both appeared innocent and unaware, they would be safe, she was sure of it.

She ventured one cautious question. "This is not the first hospital I've been in, is it, and you're not the original doctor to take my case?"

"No. There were three—maybe four, I can look it up—other hospitals, and, as for doctors—" he threw up his hands—"I must be the thousandth. Some day I'll show you your medical file. It's a foot thick. By the time you were turned over to us, everybody thought that you were merely custodial, you see. Then you surprised us by getting better, and I began to cherish the hope of a complete cure. Unfortunately, in a case like yours, it's the patient who has to do most of the work, and all you've demonstrated is a disposition to avoid the effort."

"I won't pretend any more," she said, smiling at him with genuine affection, but, of course, it was a promise she could not possibly keep.

That interview marked the end of her comfortable isolation. She had known there were other patients

in the hospital, hundreds of them she was told, but she had seen nothing of them except at a distance. Her quarters were in a small wing of the building that was restricted, apparently, to her own use. They included her large room and bath, a small kitchen where trays were left for distribution elsewhere on the floor, the offices of Dr. Lindsay and his secretary, and an elegant meeting room labeled Hospital Board that, as far as she had observed, never had a meeting in it. It was a marvel that so busy an institution should have so quiet a corner. Every afternoon and evening, from her window she saw the cars, creeping up the long and distant drive from the main road (which she had never seen) to fill the two large parking lots; and, at ten o'clock at night, there might still be the car lights of a departing late visitor. Yet all day long, up to now, she had spoken to no one but Dr. Lindsay, a floor nurse or two, and Wally. Now she was going to be put through a period of social testing, and she must be doubly on guard.

The shopping trip to the village was easy. The stores were good, her accounts limited only by the number of times she wished to sign her name—which she was careful to do in a schoolbookish hand that had no

distinguishing marks, she hadn't the slightest notion of what Ellen Porter's signature should be like—and her mentor, a young nurse's aide named Miss Raymond, pleasant and only mildly watchful. But oh, the exhilaration of being outside again, of becoming, for a few hours, one of the everyday inhabitants of the everyday world! From where they were walking on Main Street, she could see the depot set on the edge of the town and the tracks fanning out from it, and, for a wild minute, she estimated the number of blocks she would have to run to reach it and her possible rate of speed, as matched against Miss Raymond's. She reproved herself immediately for such silliness. If she escaped that way, they would search the world over for her until they found her and brought her back to her luxurious jail. The only good way to leave was with their full connivance and approval, which she must earn by showing them (*who?*) that she was perfectly willing to play the role they had assigned her.

Even this knowledge could not keep her from savoring the day—October's blue and gold, the leaf smoke, the calling of children to each other in school play yards, the good lunch at the little restaurant on the

square where the marble Civil War soldier stood holding his rifle, the lovely things they showed her in the stores. She bought presents for the nurses and huge boxes of candy for the clerical help; serviceable skirts and sweaters, but in pretty colors, for herself; a bottle of perfume for Miss Raymond; a bright jacket for Wally; a handsome leather box for Dr. Lindsay's desk; and, on impulse, a round glass paperweight that responded to the light by throwing back a hundred different shades of blue.

Miss Raymond said the paperweight was the prettiest thing she had ever seen. "A person could look at it forever, Mrs. Porter. Is it for your little desk by the window?"

"No, it's not for myself at all. It's for Robert." It came out so easily that it must have been in her mind from the beginning, yet she would take an oath that she had never contemplated giving Robert a gift, nor even considered the prospect of meeting him. "He's—he's my husband."

"Yes, I know, and he ought to be awfully pleased. Well, shall we go find your books?"

Across the street, granite steps led up to a door marked Carnegie Public Library, where, undoubtedly, there were reference books that would tell her

all about the very rich Ellen Porter. "Miss Raymond, if you have some shopping of your own to do, I promise to stay in the reading room till you come back. Why don't you—"

"No, indeed, Mrs. Porter. I'm not going to leave you for a moment."

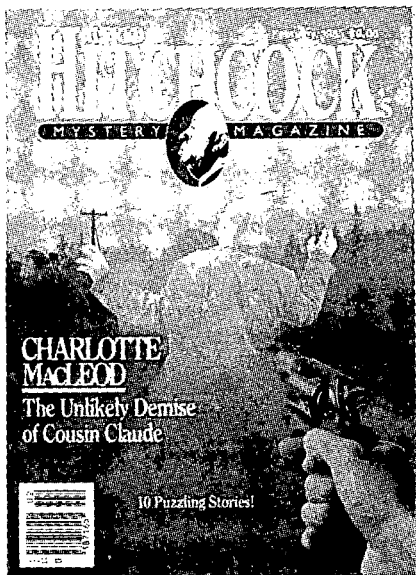
"I only want to see some gardening books. I want to read about weeds."

"Gardening books are all right," said Miss Raymond, "if you show me the titles of what you read, and if I'm sitting right beside you." She had the grace to look apologetic. "Your reading is still controlled, you see. Dr. Lindsay's orders."

"Oh, dear, just when I felt so free! Come along, then, and tell the librarian what I can look at."

The librarian said they had no books on weeds, only some government pamphlets, but any book on gardens was bound to mention weeds, it seemed to her, and Miss Raymond concurred. So gardening books were heaped on the table in front of Mrs. Porter, and she turned the pages resignedly, while her nurse became immediately absorbed in fashion magazines.

But luck was with her. The third book she opened was entitled *Famous Gardens of the World*, and Chapter Ten was headed "Mrs. Robert Porter's



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Garden at Quercorum in Connecticut"! It was illustrated by a full-page picture, in color, of Mrs. Porter, standing near her prize delphinium, with a great white stone house stretching away behind her. Her heart began to beat suffocatingly, but she controlled her breath and composed her face. Both the pictured woman and the house were completely strange to her.

Greedily she assimilated what information she could. Ellen Porter had married her second cousin, Robert Porter, more than twenty years ago. The marriage was childless but the void had been filled with the diversions of the wealthy—travel, the maintenance of six residences (only the one in Connecticut was identified), yachting, the breeding of race horses, the exchanges of visits with friends. Mrs. Porter looked after her own business affairs. "It was my branch of the family that made the money," she was quoted as saying, "and I feel it my responsibility to look after it. Robert is really not a businessman so it all works out for the best."

She studied the picture for a long time. The real Ellen Porter was at least fifteen years older than herself, with a high-bridged nose, deep frown lines, a tight straight-lipped mouth. The conspirators had been care-

ful about the only two characteristics that plastic surgery could not change; height and eye color. "So I'm tall, and my eyes are blue," she mused, "but where did they find me? When was the substitution made? Whatever my real identity, I must have had friends, relatives. But I suppose they wouldn't recognize me now, anyway." She smoothed her hair, feeling the tiny scars hidden there. "So there can be no danger to anyone, as long as my memory doesn't return, completely—and with all that surgery, I bet they've made sure that it won't."

Then she turned the page and saw the picture labeled "Robert Porter." How long she stared at it, she had no idea. When she raised her eyes, Miss Raymond was still reading her magazines, the librarian was helping some teenagers with the card catalogue, all was as it had been. Except that now she was in love with Robert Porter, who must be one of the handsomest and most appealing men in existence.

Alive with plans that would bring Robert to her, she was politic with Dr. Lindsay the next morning and spoke casually about Mr. Crandall's eventual visit. "What if I want to make

changes in my business affairs, Dr. Lindsay. Am I allowed to? I mean, is my signature legal?"

"It will be, the minute I vouch for it, Mrs. Porter. I'm not ready to do that, yet. Mr. Crandall has your power-of-attorney; however, and I daresay he'll be inclined to act on your suggestions."

She smiled at him. "You don't consider me sane?"

"'Sane' is a word I rarely use. I just think you're not—ready."

And that afternoon, as if to corroborate him, came the relapse, shockingly, suddenly, out of the blue. One minute she was weeding in the very middle of the Hidden Garden, calling occasional remarks to Wally on his bench; the next, she was staring down at something smooth and hard that her fingers were encountering, under the mat of weeds. It was a metal plate, brass it seemed, and as she tore the weeds away, she saw the writing on it. "To the memory of—" it began. She scraped and pulled, deliberately averting her eyes until she could see it all. "To the memory of Ellen Porter, 1900-1962, this garden, of her own planning, is gratefully dedicated." Streaked with dirt, panting from exertion, she stared at it, openmouthed. So Ellen Porter was dead, and this is where they had buried her..

A black cloud of terror swept down on her, suffocating, paralyzing. She fought it off, got to her feet, ran—somewhere, anywhere. She heard Wally's voice calling to her, but she could not stop. She collapsed, finally, against the wall of the hospital, near the side door that they always used, and felt Wally's grasp on her arms.

"Mrs. Porter, what's happened? Are you all right? Mrs. Porter?"

She saw a nurse and an orderly racing up behind him. "Yes," she managed to gasp, "I'm—all right. Saw—a snake. Always been—scared to death—of snakes."

"Good grief! I think you just set a new world's record for the half-mile." He turned to the newcomers. "She saw a snake."

But the staff was suspicious, alert. They put her to bed for the rest of the day, had the private nurses back again for forty-eight hours, chatted amiably to her—and watched. Dr. Lindsay paid her a special visit. "Seems funny to see you in bed again," he said. "Just a precaution against your having overdone it."

"It was a silly way to act. I feel so apologetic."

"We went up to look for your snake, but we didn't find one." He took her wrist between his fingers. "That seems to be a

pretty little garden you've unearthed. We're going to ask the hospital board to let us restore it. It shouldn't have been let go." He put her hand down on the coverlet and patted it. "Must have been a shock to you, coming across your own name like that. It was your Aunt Ellen, you know, who gave us this hospital."

"I'd—forgotten."

"No ingratitude involved on our part, just a shortage of gardeners during the war. It's only a memorial kind of thing. Your aunt is buried in Rome, I believe."

She could not keep her voice from sounding defensive. "It *did* look like a grave, you know."

"And who did you think was buried there?" he asked gently.

Her thoughts ran around like mice in a cage, while the silence grew and grew. "I—I don't believe I thought at all," she said, finally. "It was—how does Wally say it?—a gut reaction."

"Is that your best analysis? I can't quite believe that, Mrs. Porter."

"Then work on it till you can!" she said, crossly. "Some things aren't easy!" In his shout of surprised laughter her tension eased. "And you can just take that night nurse out of my room tonight, too. I can't sleep with another person in the room—unless it's Robert." The

last three words amazed her—she had not meant to say them—but she realized that they were absolutely right. "When are you going to let Robert come?" she asked, and burst into tears.

"Mr. Crandall can come week after next," he said, "and Robert a week or so after that." He handed her a handkerchief. "That's rushing things, but if you refuse to be patient and rational—"

"I have been *extremely* patient, Dr. Lindsay."

"And rational?"

She smiled at him, while she wiped her eyes. "Women aren't supposed to be rational. Ask anybody."

He went away laughing, and the dangerous moment was past. Heavens, he was such a young man, hard to mislead, but not difficult to charm!

That night she received the first of the shocking notes.

She had fallen asleep reading, her bed light on. When she awoke, the door to her room was swinging slightly, and she called, "Come back. I'm awake." But no one came, and she guessed that the draft had been caused by the opening of an outside door in some distant corridor. It had happened before, on windy evenings.

Then she turned to put her book on the bedside table, and there lay the note. It was on plain white paper—torn from her own tablet, she thought later—folded once, handwritten in large, jagged, black letters.

Insist on Robert's coming to see you. Be sure to mention the Gregory Porter lawsuit to Arthur Crandall, beforehand. Robert always wanted that settled. E.

She lay motionless for a long time before she could summon the nerve to re-read it. Not once did she doubt that it was from the real Ellen Porter; the positiveness of the words and the insolence of the ugly handwriting were absolutely convincing. She was glad to put a match to it, to see it fall into black flakes in the ashtray.

It cost her a real effort to turn off the light, though leaving it on would, she knew, eventually bring nurses to ask questions. For hours she lay awake, ears strained for any hint of approach, but there were only the usual hospital night sounds, hushed, as always in this isolated room. In the first dim light of morning, she reached for her pen and wrote a note of her own.

Dear Mrs. Porter:

I want to cooperate, but I don't understand my situation. Now that you are well enough to get around, I don't see why I am needed any more at all. Is there any place where we could meet and talk? I am very willing to be helpful—it's the only way I know to get out of here—but I could do much better if I knew what was expected of me.

She could not decide on a signature, so she simply folded the note and left it where the other had been.

Ten minutes later, she sat up suddenly, tore the note into tiny shreds, and burned it, too, though her hands were shaking so badly she had trouble holding the match. Oh, that was all she needed, to have someone come across a communication like that one! "Crazy," they'd say. "A crazy woman writing formal letters to herself!" Nor could she go roaming over the hospital, snooping and trying doors.

She must preserve an effect of normality; she dared do nothing else. Any future communication had to depend on the real Mrs. Porter, who, startlingly enough, did not seem unfriendly. And was, at least, alive.

Arthur Crandall turned out to be a grayhaired, stocky, bustling man, with the alert, sidewise glance of a high class horse that has been mistreated. "You're looking well, Mrs. Porter," he said. "Glad to see you so blooming."

"Be honest," she said. "Would you have known me if you'd passed me on the street?"

"Well, maybe not. But the change is all to the good. All to the good. There are many resemblances, naturally. I think I'd know your hands anywhere." He sat down opposite her. "Now, what can I do for you, after all this long while? What's on your mind?"

"Several things. The first is that, since I'm healthy once more, I'd like to leave the hospital."

"That depends entirely on Dr. Lindsay. He's the one who has to discharge you. Naturally we'd be happy to see him do it. There are matters on which we'd welcome your decision."

"I hope you'll say so to him. He won't discuss my leaving with me at all."

"That's because he still has some reservations about you. He didn't tell me what they were. Just said that he had 'em. Medical men are pretty conservative, you know. Have to give them a little time." He

slapped his hand down on the arm of his chair. "But if you could see yourself, sitting there, smiling, with pink in your face—you look better this minute than you ever did in your whole life! And I've known you for forty years!"

She smiled her best smile at him. "Thank you, Arthur." A small tremor in his face told her that the first-name basis was new. "I'm very fond of Dr. Lindsay, but you're going to have to find some little ways to pressure him into letting me go. Not bad little ways. Nice little ways. I remember you as a subtle man, Arthur."

He flushed with pleasure. "Oh, I think we can hurry him up a little. Surely by early spring we'll have brought him around. Will that suit you?"

"Yes. You understand that there are things I will never remember because of the surgery. Dr. Lindsay says there's no help for that."

"I understand. Everyone on the board understands."

"Good. Now the next item is Robert. Will he come to visit me? I imagine that he isn't very eager to see me, but I want very much to see him."

"So I was told. Yes, I believe that he'll come. For one thing he's still legally your husband. For another, he isn't a man to hold grudges." He cleared his

throat. "As your lawyer I'd be interested in knowing *why* you want to see him."

She spoke simply and directly. "I want to be reconciled to him, if he'll have me."

"My God!" he said. "Mrs. Porter, are you sure? After all those years of our dragging him into court on one contrived pretext or another? I don't think I'll be able to look him in the face, much less talk to him!"

"I'll take all the blame—for everything," she said earnestly, "and you're going to have to help me convince him that I've changed. For instance, settle the Gregory Porter business right away. Give Gregory what he wants, give him *more* than he wants. It's long overdue."

Mr. Crandall's jaw went slack. "But that would mean—mind you, I've always been in favor of settling with Gregory, all we could do was delay him, he was always going to win in the long run—but to settle now, and willingly, knocks the props out of our defense against the suits of about eight other relatives of yours who think they're entitled to—"

"Settle with them, too. I want them off my mind."

"All of them?"

"All of them. As the old proverb has it, 'There are no pockets in shrouds.'"

"Well, of course, that's an em-

inently sensible viewpoint, Mrs. Porter, and, as you'll see when we go over the figures, your finances have never been in better shape. You can afford it."

She smiled. "What I don't want to afford is the time to go over the figures. I'm going to be completely honest with you, Arthur. If Robert will have me back, I intend to give my power-of-attorney to him and turn over the whole boring business to the two of you."

"But—but what will *you* be doing?"

"Enjoying life," she said.

He made gasping sounds for ten minutes, but, in the long run, she thought he was not displeased. She made bold to kiss his cheek before he left. "Dear Arthur, you've put up with so much. Just a few months more and I hope you'll be dealing with a stable Robert instead of an eccentric Ellen."

He was nonplussed, but he was a man who said what he had on his mind. "If you're not sane right this minute, Mrs. Porter, then there's no hope for any of us."

So she had made the right impression on the very important Mr. Crandall, and the results began to appear immediately. The hospital people, always attentive and kind, snapped into some-

thing like military precision, and Dr. Lindsay, though friendly as usual, began to look harried. "I've told your Mr. Crandall that he can begin to familiarize you with your business affairs, though I think he's being a bit premature. Don't let him tire you out."

"I won't. Though I don't believe I'll ever be very interested in business things again. I told him I wanted Robert to take care of all that for me."

"I think I should tell you that Robert is not being responsive to the idea of a reconciliation," he said, frowning. "Like Mr. Crandall, I think that he'll come 'round eventually, but I don't want you to build on it and then be disappointed."

She quoted him to himself. "I will face reality as honestly and cheerfully as possible."

"Good. Plus a touch of rule five."

"I will assume that the unhappy are always wrong. Therefore, I will try to be happy."

"I thought you *were*, you know. Now it seems that you can't wait to get away from us."

"Please, *please* don't think that, Dr. Lindsay. It's not that I'm running *away* from something, it's that I'm running *toward* something else."

His face cleared. "Well, that helps. Now, let's get down to work. Nurse Hanson tells me

she's found you sleeping with your lights on three times this week. How do you account for that? Does darkness worry you all of a sudden?"

Every Tuesday afternoon, like clockwork, Mr. Crandall visited her, with eyes that saw everything. "New dress, Mrs. Porter? Beautiful shade of blue. Your sapphires might go well with that." And the next day a messenger from the bank appeared in an armored car with case after case of extravagant blue baubles.

Embarrassed at the display, she chose sparingly and sent the rest back. "We have no security precautions here, Arthur, and I didn't like to risk—but aren't these earrings sublime? Are they really real?"

"Yes. We have a good many facsimiles, but those are the real thing. I have a theory that it does jewels good to have a lovely woman wear them."

"Thank you. It would be nice to be younger."

"You were not nearly as handsome then as you are now."

"Will Robert think so?"

His mouth tightened. "It has been some time since Robert has favored me with his opinions, Mrs. Porter."

Most of the time, however, it was like having one's own personal genie. One shiver from Ellen-in-a-wool-coat, and Mr.

Crandall offered her a warmer one. "Your sable is probably still hanging in the closet at Quercorum. I can get it to you by Friday."

"Tell me," she said, pouring his tea, "are my delphinium still in the garden there? They were so lovely, remember?"

"I—well, I'll inquire. There's no gardener these days, I believe. Only a skeleton staff at any of the houses."

The sable coat arrived promptly. She drew its dark splendor from the pink-enamelled box and saw that there was a note. "Delphinium all present and accounted for," wrote Mr. Crandall. "My office is looking around for some house help, including a gardener. I'm assuming that you plan to spend part of next summer at Quercorum? I always thought you liked it the best of your residences."

At night, her bedlights carefully extinguished, her ears alert for a possible intruder, she lay imagining the scene in the magazine—the great house, the tall blue flowers, the man with the sensitive mouth in the background—with a different woman standing where the embittered Mrs. Porter had stood, a woman who, smiling and serene, reached out a hand to her husband to draw him into the very center of the picture.

Just before Christmas, Robert came to see her. The preparations had been long-drawn-out and ticklish, so she was ready for him, from the tension in her stomach to the bowl of holly on her table to the sapphire earrings that gave her courage. From noon on the appointed day, she sat by her window, watching a snowy stretch of walk that he was almost sure to traverse; and so she saw him before he saw her—a tall, thin man, limping, leaning heavily on a cane, being careful of the slippery walk. The face was still handsome, but so drawn that she was moved nearly to tears.

Because she had found honesty to be the best policy whenever she could afford it, the first thing she said to him was, "I didn't know you limped. Nobody told me."

"It's from the accident. Other people are used to it by now, so they wouldn't think to mention it to you. For a while I was not sure I would walk again."

"Both of us have changed," she said. "Oh, Robert, it was good of you to come." She did not offer to shake hands. Something in his manner made her think it inadvisable.

That first visit was brief, awkward, and the subsequent ones were hardly better. He avoided her eyes, retreated from

any proximity, spoke in a constrained way. Sometimes they drove down to the village for lunch—he had to sign out for her permission to go, which seemed to amuse him a little—but he never suggested that he sign her out for a weekend, which he had the legal right to do and which Dr. Lindsay might well have permitted.

None of her conversational gambits worked out well. "Are you staying at Quercorum?" she asked.

"No. I'm staying in a house I bought a few years ago, up near Concord. Have a young married couple to do the chores for me."

"But Quercorum is quite close. Don't you like it there?"

"Under the circumstances, no."

The forbidding tone in his voice always scared her off, and she could think of nothing safe to say, and their visits would end in painful silence.

"Mr. Crandall says the Gregory Porter thing is settled," she told him one afternoon.

"I know. Greg came to thank me, and I told him I had nothing whatever to do with it."

"You did, though. Indirectly."

"I'm glad it wasn't taken to court. We wouldn't have had a good press."

"If things work out as I hope,

and if you take full charge of my affairs for me—"

"That would be quite impossible," he said, sharply. "Crandall said something about that, and I refused, unequivocally."

The only hopeful sign was that he kept coming—once a week, twice, three times. "I think you're getting a *little* used to me," she said. "Do I still seem like a stranger to you?"

"You're always charming these days. Which makes you quite a stranger indeed."

"I know I behaved unbearably to you but, thank God, I don't remember a lot of it. Since you haven't the advantage of a bad memory, I can only hope you'll forgive me, eventually."

"I didn't mean to be caustic. I was stating a fact."

"Then I'll state a fact, too. I regret most of the past. Except our marriage. I'll never regret that."

She expected that to please him, but he fell silent and left early again that day.

By the middle of February she was prickly with nerves and hard put to preserve the good-natured outgoing exterior the hospital seemed so fond of. Then, out of a magazine she picked up from her bedside table fluttered the second of the strange notes. The jagged black handwriting stared up at her from the floor until she bent,

stiff with distaste, to pick it up.

- Robert's no better than a murderer. It wasn't his fault he had no luck with it. Tell him so. E.

Carefully she burnt the note in an ashtray. Then she walked out to ask the nurses on the floor whether they had seen anyone entering or leaving her room.

"No, Mrs. Porter. No one's gone by here, and they'd have to, to get to you."

"I think it would be a woman," she said, incautiously. "One of the other patients, maybe?"

"It certainly wouldn't be a patient. This isn't a free floor. Is something missing from your room?"

She saw that their eyes were intent, speculative. "Oh, no, no. Nothing like that. It's only—well, I found a magazine that I didn't recognize, and I thought someone might have left it for me—"

She retreated in a flurry of excuses, but not soon enough. She had earned herself a black mark for the day, and Dr. Lindsay brought the matter up the next morning.

"Are you well enough acquainted with one of our women patients for her to *want* to visit you, Mrs. Porter?"

"Well, no. I speak to some of

them in passing, but I don't know their names or anything. I just thought maybe—"

"What magazine was it?"

"Oh. Well, one of those picture magazines, I think."

"You seemed quite certain yesterday. Are you less certain now?"

She felt ill—dizzy, nauseated, a ringing in her ears. She had to summon her forces to be bold. "I am not paranoic, Dr. Lindsay. I made an honest mistake, asked an idle question. To tell you the truth, I'm so upset over Robert's behavior that I don't know which way to turn. It makes me absent-minded and foolish, and I'm sorry."

That gave him something new to think about. "What about Robert? He seems quite devoted, to me. He'd come every single day, if we'd let him."

She clasped her hands. "Really? Is that really true?" The joy of it warmed her. The nausea receded. "Oh, Dr. Lindsay, you've made my day!"

"If he's being cautious, you can't blame him. It seems not to have worked out well, before."

"But it will this time," she said, confidently. "Because I know better now, don't you see?"

"What do you know? Let's talk about that."

But she could not talk about

it satisfactorily without telling him that she was not really Ellen Porter, so she stumbled over his questions and was finally dismissed, feeling like a student who had abjectly flunked an important test.

She went straight to her telephone and asked Robert to come at once. "I'll meet you outside by the fountain near the parking lot," she said. "We can have some privacy there. I have some important questions I *must* ask you. Please prepare yourself to be honest, no matter what. Absolutely honest."

The air was lively with snowflakes, and the day was cold. She waited by the fountain, huddled in her sable, squinting against the wind. A bad setting for a very serious conversation, but it was one that simply must not be overheard—by the real Ellen Porter or anyone else. (For surely one of the things the mysterious notes revealed was that the writer had some method of surveillance.) Robert arrived on the dot, his eyes curious and worried, and she didn't bother to greet him.

"I've run out of time," she said, "so I must ask these things openly. First, do you think you could ever be—well—fond of me?"

He answered without hesitation. "I'm fond of you now, and I don't in the least want to

be. At first I felt nothing because you seemed like a stranger to me, but then I saw that you were being the way you were when you were sixteen, before all the bad temper and money-grubbing set in. I wouldn't have thought you could ever be that way again, but you are."

"Good. Second question. If I had died in that accident, would you have been tried for my death?"

"Yes. I nearly was, anyway. The police tried hard to make a case—at least of manslaughter—but I was laid up for so long, and there were no immediate witnesses, and you *didn't* die—"

"Did you want me to?" she asked, gently. "Was it attempted murder?"

For the first time he looked directly at her, in a long silence. "Yes," he said, steadily. "I meant to kill us both. I hoped you wouldn't remember that, but I'm glad you have. I can't tell you how it's weighed on me all these years."

"I thought we should get that question out of the way. Does anyone else know?"

"I tried to tell Arthur Crandall, but he said he didn't want to listen to it. He said that when two people were angry and fighting each other for the steering wheel, there was no telling who was more at fault.

But I know that I aimed us straight at that abutment, and that, if you hadn't managed to turn us the least bit—"

She put her hand over his lips. "Forget about it. It doesn't matter any more."

"Now you can understand why I felt so guilty, especially when you were being friendly and dear—"

She kissed his stricken face. "We mustn't waste a minute on regret. That's one lesson I've been taught in this hospital. What we should be doing is making plans for the next twenty years or so. Shall we begin by going to Quercorum for Easter?"

He put an arm around her waist, fell into step beside her, his eyes alight. "Better yet, why don't we go down there this weekend? I could ask my young married couple to come along to do the cooking. Remember how beautiful those big oaks were in the winter? I suppose there are still seventy-nine of them. I counted them once, if you recall."

She blinked away tears of happiness. "I'd love to go there. I'd forgotten about the oak trees—"

"But that's where the place gets its name. 'Quercus' means 'oak,' in Latin. Maybe the horses are still there, too. Not that I'll ever be able to ride again—"

In their absorption, they nearly collided with Dr. Lindsay, on his way to the parking lot. "Well," said the doctor dryly. "It looks like an early spring."

They both talked to him at once, about the necessary pass for the weekend at Quercorum, about how wonderful it was that Ellen was so well, about the miracle of being given a second chance at happiness. Dr. Lindsay agreed with them on everything. There was reluctance in his eyes, but he knew when he was outnumbered.

As she and Robert continued their stroll, she was careful, however, to keep a line of trees between the hospital windows and themselves. The real Ellen Porter, seeing her husband thus engrossed, might not be completely magnanimous.

On the spring morning when Mrs. Porter left the hospital for good, holding her husband's arm, talking to the circle of doctors and nurses that attended her, Wally thought she looked great. Very happy. Animated. Beautiful, almost, though that was a funny word to use about a woman who was fiftyish. He traded smiles with her—he had said his own farewells the day before—and then stood back and just watched, out of the way of the fuss the hospital appar-

ently felt it had to make over a member of the Founding Family.

Thus he saw a strange little occurrence that no one else appeared to see. He saw Mrs. Porter, still laughing and talking and without once lowering her eyes from the faces around her, reach into her purse, bring out a small notebook, write something on one of the pages, tear the page from the notebook, fold it carefully, and put pen and notebook away, retaining the folded note in her gloved hand. There was nothing odd about any of that, except her cleverness at writing without looking; but five minutes later, just before she entered her car, she looked down at the folded paper, recoiled as if she'd seen a tarantula, and threw the little piece of paper, still folded, into the gutter.

So I'm imaginative, he thought, I make things up, why would anybody be repelled by something he had just written? And when, after the car had driven off and the godspeed group dispersed, he picked up

the folded paper and read it, he was still puzzled. In an angular, black handwriting, the note said: "I am content to remain here, having set you free. You are rid of me for good. Be happy. I never was. E." A strange little note, but not a repulsive one. And, of course, Mrs. Porter hadn't even read it—though, since she had written it, she must know what it said.

Wally, old boy, he told himself, pull yourself together. This note could not possibly have been written by Mrs. Porter, it's a crazy little note and must have been handed to her by another patient; the hand is quicker than the eye, there must have been *two* pieces of paper, and you're mistaken about the whole business.

For a moment he thought of showing the note to Dr. Lindsay, as a psychological curiosity, but it was getting near dinnertime and he was hungry. He pitched the paper into a trash can and walked down the hill toward home, whistling. The days when the sick recovered were the best of days.

UNSOLVED

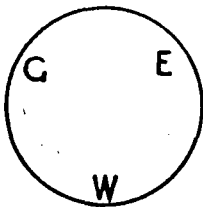
by Hubert
Phillips ("Caliban")

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the December issue.

Here's another test (not a very easy one) about that peculiar island where there coexist the Blues (who always tell the truth), the Whites (who always lie), and the Pinks (who, when asked a series of questions, tell the truth and lie alternately). But don't forget that a Pink's first answer may be a lie.

To George, Edward, and William, three natives of the island, I put these three questions: (1) What is your left-hand neighbor? (2) What is your right-hand neighbor? (3) What are you?



The three natives were seated as in the diagram, facing one another. Here are their answers:

George:	(1) White,	(2) Pink,	(3) Blue.
Edward:	(1) Pink,	(2) Pink,	(3) Blue.
William:	(1) White,	(2) Blue,	(3) Blue.

To which race, in fact, does each of the three belong?

See page 108 for the solution to the October puzzle.

"Three Natives," taken from My Best Puzzles in Logic and Reasoning by Hubert Phillips ("Caliban"). Copyright © 1961 by Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.

FICTION

Man Next Door

by Jas. R. Petrin

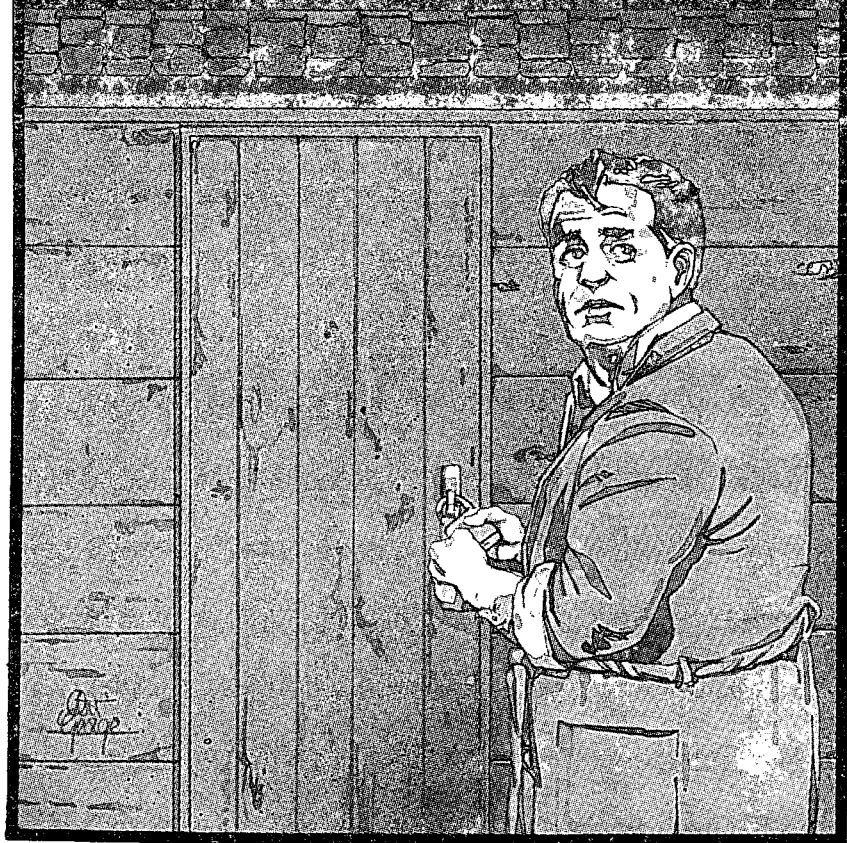


Illustration by Arthur George

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Crash. Steel rang against steel.

Jones winced in the calm of the purple morning, then let fly one last tremendous blow of his hammer against the uptilted steel box of his three-ton truck. The hammer leaped in his hands. The explosion caromed off Peterson's house next door like a cannon blast, rolled on out into the dawn, and a treeful of birds flew away.

He slid down the bed of the truck, letting himself go, breaking loose like a lump of old dry clay, coming heavily to the ground, raising a dust. He arched his back for relief and shook the pain out of his fists: thirty swings of a nine-pound hammer before the morning eggs were no joke. But he smiled and patiently waited, knowing that his special effort was bound to be rewarded.

Now old Peterson would be untangling himself from his bed, climbing up out of his sheets and dreams toward his pants and his bedroom door, now plunging into his stairwell on little driving feet, chins and stomachs leaping—careful; don't get wedged between the rails—now surging through his kitchen like a sea, over his cat, now—

Peterson's door burst open, and there was Peterson himself hissing out, half in pajamas,

half in pants, blowing hatred like a bugler through his walrus mustache. He rocked there in his slippers like a man about to pounce.

"Morning," Jones sang out pleasantly; no one would accuse *him* of bad feeling. "Didn't wake you, did I? Just busting some mud off the old truck—do you think it'll rain?"

The houses were separated by forty yards of grass, but Jones could feel the rage tremble in Peterson's thick flesh, feel Peterson's pain as the stubby fingers dug into the wooden railing. Jones repeated himself, "Good morning," and headed up his own back steps for breakfast, tramping and stamping the dust off his boots, remembering to give the screen door an extra hard slam: nothing like a good old fashioned screen door; you could get a sound out of it like a rifle shot.

Mavis swept sausages and eggs onto his plate.

"Nice morning out there?"

"Beautiful."

"Calm?"

"Yep."

"You were up extra early. It's just barely six now."

"Work to be done."

Jones tipped himself out a flood of steam and black coffee. His eyes wandered, searching for toast.

"Don't tell me you're working

today, for heaven's sake," Mavis said. "It's Sunday. I thought we could sit out quiet with lemonade. There's a new *National Geographic* just come," she added enticingly.

"Lots to do." Jones reached for the ketchup. "Idle hands do the devil's work."

Mavis said nothing. She stood by the sink watching, waiting for Jones's dirty dishes. Maybe she was hoping for a storm of them to whirl her and swirl her to safety down the drain.

Jones wiped egg off his chin and slammed out to the shed for his chain saw. He had tuned the saw up only a week ago, but another adjustment wouldn't hurt. He yanked the rusted muffler off and hefted the greasy machine out into the yard.

It barked on the first pull.

Without a muffler the old saw pealed and clattered like a stuck Bren gun. It was powerfully loud; it hammered out pain. Jones worked the throttle, grinning against the noise, keeping the edge of his eye fixed on Peterson's door. The whale would be crouching there among his rakes. A curtain jerked, then slapped shut again. Jones gunned the engine till it screamed.

He kept up testing and watching for ten minutes, letting Peterson have the full adult

dose; then, to let the saw cool and get the ringing out of his ears, went in for more coffee.

"I never heard your old saw howl like that before," Mavis said, elbow-deep in dishes and soap. "What's wrong with it? Have you got sand in the oil again?"

"Nothing's wrong with it."

"Well, it's loud, that's all. What about old Peterson?"

Jones snarled up like a city clerk. "To hell with old Peterson! I'll make all the damn noise I want to. I'll give him noises that'll grate on his skull. I'll hire twenty teachers to screech twenty chalks down twenty blackboards into a microphone. I'll whine dentist drills at him over the telephone. Noise, eh? He'll learn what noise is before I'm through with him."

Mavis eyed Jones over the suds. "What's got up your neck?"

"Nothing. It's just that noise is a part of life. We got to have noise, don't we?" He chimed his fork into his cup to prove it. "People got to get used to noise. Our own bodies make noise—have you ever thought about the racket that goes on under your ribs, all the pounding and sloshing? We don't hear it because we're used to it. I bet cave men were kept up half the night by it. Take yourself, now: noise don't bother you. You're used to it."

Mavis thought about that while Jones drummed the table.

"And so Peterson can damn well get used to it, too. He's been mooning that cream pie face of his at me ever since we moved in here. Then yesterday he comes thundering over here like a rampaging vengeance and orders—*orders* me to shut off my own lawn mower. And you know what? I was so thunderclapped, I actually did it! Then all puffed up with himself, he starts to walk away. So I let him have it."

"Ah," said Mavis, "you hit him."

"I *should* have hit him. I *wanted* to hit him. But I didn't. I just told him off is all."

"What did you say?"

"Just the truth, which is all a man needs. That sound can't hurt nobody. That it's not like heaving rocks or something. A bit of a ruckus is all part of being alive, I told him. You got to get used to it. That's how people get along, I said; by getting used to things."

"So what did he say?"

"What *could* he say? He stormed off into his house, hissing like he was some kind of human fuse. I got another swipe in at him then. I shouted, 'And you, Peterson, are too damned quiet! I don't let that get on *my* nerves, do I?'"

Jones drained his coffee in two long sudden swallows and banged his empty cup down angrily. "Noise ain't so different from silence, after all. Neither one is like sticks or stones—they don't hurt nobody."

Mavis took a damp towel from the rack and began mopping the dishes.

"I'm heading back out," said Jones, like a prospector. "I got some shingling to do, I just remembered. Then maybe I'll fire up the tiller and rattle it over the back garden once or twice or half a dozen times. It's a loud brute," he added with satisfaction.

Jones found plenty to do over the next few days.

Every morning he mowed his lawn. On Saturday he peeled the rolled siding off his shed like a prehistoric skin and nailed it back on again. Sunday he cut and split a seven foot stack of firewood. "In case there's an ice age," he told Mavis. And he started a new habit: honking the horn of his truck—a friendly toot for Mavis—each time he came or went. Mavis's hand waved like a lily behind the screen.

That was when Peterson began to play dirty.

He sicked the police on Jones.

Jones rattled home one evening in his truck, and there was

a police cruiser crouched in the grass waiting for him, all winking red plastic and growling radio, and pale-faced young cops in pressed uniforms and polished black leather. Of course, they wouldn't admit right out they were there to do Peterson's dirty work; they would only say they had come about the noise.

Jones swallowed his rage like a pill and laughed.

"Hell, I don't make much real noise around here. Oh, *some* noise, I guess—but a man's got to live, don't he? I got a truck, a lawn mower, a hammer, some everyday chores to do. But no wild parties, or anything like that. The most noise I ever make is to slam the door when the old lady's nagging me." He winked to show he was an easy-going fellow. "Say, boys, shouldn't you be out looking for criminals—*real* criminals?"

The two policemen exchanged a private glance. They drove quietly away, maybe on the lookout for murderers.

"It's all in someone's head," Jones shouted.

When Jones got home next day for lunch, Mavis said to him over a salad, "What do you suppose that fool thing is over there in Peterson's yard?"

"What fool thing?"

"I don't know. A big antenna sort of thing."

Jones got up and looked out the screen.

"Maybe it's for one of those satellite televisions or something," Mavis called from the kitchen.

"That ain't no TV antenna," said Jones.

It was a dish, all right, about three feet across and very sinister. There was a long tube projecting from its center like some sort of gun barrel, and there were shiny coils of wire spaced at intervals around its face. "It ain't even pointing at the sky," Jones noted. "It's pointing—at *us*."

He jumped back out of the doorway as if to dodge a bullet, glaring.

"Did you talk to him today? Did you ask him what it was?"

"You know you don't like me being neighborly to the man."

"Well, *be* neighborly. Find out what that idiot is up to!"

It was a bad afternoon at the machine shop. Jones twisted the heads off three bolts in a row, thinking and thinking about Peterson's contraption. All he could see in his mind was that big tube pointing right at him, while Peterson watched like a cat, laughing silently up and down his house, grinning from the windows and licking his paws. Try as he might, Jones couldn't figure out

what the thing might be. It certainly was a contraption, and no getting around it.

That evening the thing was still there. He had known it would be, of course. He eyed it warily before getting out of his truck. The late sun drooped across it, firing it with rosy life; it almost seemed to hum. Jones let himself down out of the cab and stood by the fender, silent, listening.

"It *might* be humming."

Perhaps he'd take a closer look. No harm in that, a man walking about on his own property. He began to stroll, taking an indirect route to conceal his interest.

A sagging wire fence separated the two lots, and Jones pretended to busy himself with it while raking the thing with his eyes. It was shining aluminum, and red copper, and black plastic mysterious boxes; all cabled, connected, and busily humming.

At least it *seemed* to be humming.

Two thick cables dived out of the thing like snakes and writhed into the ground. Cables thick as wrists. Cables that could carry a lot of power. Jones strained his ears: a thing had to be humming with cables like that.

He returned to his own house,

crashing the screen door behind him like a bomb. Mavis was mashing potatoes.

"Well," Jones said, "I suppose you talked to him?"

Mavis ground away, putting her arm into it.

"I hope," Jones said, "you didn't let on you were too interested. We don't want Peterson to have any satisfaction."

"I had to say something, didn't I? There he was like a big white cake, sitting over his book—something about the South Seas—ranting on about how peaceful things were with all the birds and butterflies and squirrels chirping and skittering." She stopped work, held up her masher and stared at it, twisting it to the light as though it were something new. "It really was quite pleasant, now I think of it. Very nice in a way. And do you know what he said? He said the day was as soft and full and warm as a woman's breast—that's poetry, isn't it?"

Jones roared. "I'll tell you what it is—it's perversions, that's what. I don't want to hear it. What about the thing?"

"All right, I'm coming to that, don't get your teeth into my leg. He said the little creatures weren't coming around as much any more—especially when your husband's at home, he said—but that his contraption would soon have them all back again."

"What?" Jones felt his fur going up and he growled back to the window. "That's the craziest thing I ever heard. What's it supposed to be, that thing? Some sort of electronic dog whistle for birds? He's lying!" Jones scowled out at the yard, putting his head on one side as though to overcome a distortion in the glass. "Any fool can see he's got the rotten thing aimed right at me."

Mavis took the roast out of the oven and turned down the heat under the vegetables. She addressed herself to the meat, "I'm only telling you what he said."

After supper Jones went out into the yard and made all the noises he could think of—sudden, exploding, angry-man noises that he kept up, kept up, kept up until he had to stagger back into the house, heaving, and fall into a chair.

"I don't feel good," he said.

Mavis looked at him. "That don't surprise me. You're overtired and upset. Come to bed."

But Jones knew there would be no sleep for him that night. He was used-up and sore from erupting noises all evening; he couldn't groan without pain. And out there in the night was the thing, humming, and Peterson smiling in his bed like a warm freshly-baked loaf and dreaming up nightmares for Jones.

Mavis had padded off, and he said to the empty room, "All the time I'm sitting here it's pointing right down my throat. Pointing at my red thrusting heart, my kidneys, my sucking lungs. Pointing at my *brain*." And then the sudden, terrible realization fell on him: while he, Jones, had to rest, had to stop making noises at times, *Peterson's horrible contraption just kept right on pointing. All day. All night. All the time.*

Pointing.

And he realized he was beginning to feel very, very weak.

He had to force himself out to work the next day, had to drag himself up by the scruff and march himself off like a doomed man. His head ached; his eye burned; he felt like one great open wound. He suffered at his bench, flinching from the pounding mechanical hubbub, the machine artillery and steel-working shell-bursts until finally, at the end of infinite torment, the coffee bell rang. Now he could describe the thing, the contraption, the Peterson doomsday device to the machine room boys, who were filled right up as usual with absolute truth.

"Sounds like a TV dish."

"Or a microwave antenna."

"He'd know if it was a microwave antenna."

"How would I know?" Jones asked.

"It would make you impotent."

"Hah! Then he'd never find out. You're impotent now, aren't you, Jones?"

"The ladies on Albert Street say he is. They've penciled it on the washroom walls."

"First, it'd make him weak. Cook him slowly on the insides. Like with your microwave ovens, the way they roast meat. Blow up an egg like a hand grenade, those things. Radiation. Horrible. Wouldn't have one in the house."

At lunch, of course, the thing was still there.

Jones knew he should eat. He had Mavis build him an especially big sandwich out of last night's roast, but he could only manage one bite before pushing it away.

"Better eat," Mavis said. "Can't go on if you don't."

"How can I eat while that crazy Peterson's shooting me full of microwaves?"

"Microwaves? Don't be foolish. I told you that thing is just some sort of fancy bird caller."

Jones found himself shouting, "Well, I'm no bird! Why is he aiming his stupid bird caller at me?"

"There's a simple reason, most likely. Why don't you ask him?"

This was good advice. He had

to face Peterson down. He couldn't just sit here going medium rare while Peterson laughed.

He swarmed down to the back fence like a grenadier. He glared poison at the thing that lay twinkling happily in the sun. He shouted, "Peterson! Come out here! You hear me, Peterson? Peterson—"

Peterson glided like an egg gently and correctly out onto his back step. He wore a neat smile like the badge of some high office.

"And don't you dare 'good morning' me," Jones yelled. "Just tell me where you get off pointing this here killer machine at me all day, all night, all the time. Just you tell me that, Peterson."

Peterson pulled at his chins. He strained to scratch the back of his head, like a man working out a riddle. "You're not referring to my electronic bird caller, are you?"

"Bird caller! Don't try that one on me. You know this thing is aimed right at my living room chair."

Peterson tittered, although his egg-face didn't move. Perhaps the chick inside him was attempting to break out.

"Don't be silly," he said. "It's aimed at the west marshes. That's where all the birds fly off to, for some reason, on evenings and weekends. Your house just

happens to be situated along my line of shot."

"Shot? There, I knew it. I'm warning you, Peterson, just you fire your shots somewhere else or I'll put the cops onto *you* for a change. I know what you're up to. That thing of yours is starting to ruin my health, and I swear I'll have you up on charges if you don't get rid of it by . . ." He thought a moment. "By noon tomorrow!"

Peterson giggled his thin, eggshell laugh. "Oh, it can't harm you at all. You're just being silly, Mr. Jones." He closed the door, then opened it and said, "It's all in your head, you know," and closed it again. Jones could hear him rolling about inside the place and giggling. He would be holding his sides and tilting like one of those round-bottomed plastic clowns.

Jones turned in a rage and threw a stone at the thing.

He missed.

Noon tomorrow came and went.

Jones had scarcely set the telephone down when the police arrived. They were prompt: you had to say that for them. Time on their hands, most likely. All the local murderers gone on an outing.

It was the same two officers as before, the young dry ones. They listened with bland,

blinking faces, then went dutifully off to investigate. One of them interviewed Peterson. The other poked around at the thing, looking very official and putting his ear down to it. Then they reported back. The machine was harmless, they said—just a dummy. It didn't hum, nor could it. It was just a collection of junk. They lurched away in their car, whispering, blinking, heads tipped together.

And this was the law at work. Jones turned to Mavis, disgusted. "Peterson bribed them," he said.

Days passed. Then weeks. Jones missed more and more work, spent whole afternoons peering at the thing from behind a curtain; then, in a burst, dashing into the yard to pound out noise like a blacksmith.

He ordered food by the plate, then wouldn't eat it.

He had Mavis cook him up a special full-course meal of turkey with mashed potatoes, pumpkin pie, apple stuffing—all the options. But when all was ready and Mavis called him from a spice-scented, gravy-steamed kitchen, he couldn't get up off the sofa.

"I'm sick," he pleaded.

"What do you mean 'sick'? I got a whole roasted turkey sitting in here, sizzling. Come and eat."

"Can't. Better get the doctor out. I'm bad, Mavis, really bad."

"You're starved, that's all. You need a nice meal—and a good night's sleep."

"Get the doctor."

The doctor clanked his tools back into his bag, frowning.

"You're worn out, Mr. Jones."

"I know that—tell Mavis."

"You're all run down like a battery. You're not on one of those crazy new diets, are you?"

"Course not. It's that Peterson next door. He fires radiation at me all day and night. Turned my whole house into a giant microwave oven. Sometimes I can *feel* myself cooking in a slow, creeping boil, feel like I'm going to blow up like an egg. Just you look at that contraption out there. Show him, Mavis."

The doctor bowed at the window. "Looks like a TV antenna to me."

"Well, it ain't," cried Jones, "don't you see? He's got the damned thing aimed right at this house—right at *me*, if you want to know the truth. Says it's an electronic bird caller, the liar. Who does he think he's kidding?"

Mavis pulled the doctor aside and told him about the police inspection. The doctor thought, then said, "It's no use telling him the thing is harmless if he

doesn't believe it. As long as he's convinced it's hurting him, it may be doing just that. The human mind, Mrs. Jones, has a great hold over the body for good or ill. It's a powerful instrument."

Mavis was skeptical. "*His* mind?"

The doctor went on. "In the tropics, you know, that is the power of black magic. A witch doctor may simply point a bone at a man and tell him he is going to waste away and die. And very often that is just what happens—the poor fellow withers away."

"So Peterson's a witch doctor?"

The doctor squeezed out a dry little laugh, as though his profession left him short on humor and he had to ration it. "The point I'm trying to make, Mrs. Jones, is your husband is convinced Mr. Peterson is trying to harm him, and that thing out there *does* seem to be pointing directly at this house." He picked up his bag. "I'll talk to Mr. Peterson."

A day later the doctor called back. "I phoned your neighbor and explained things. He was very agreeable. Such a pleasant man. He didn't realize his bird caller—it *is* a bird caller—was having such an effect on your husband. He said that as a fa-

vor to the 'best little chef in the world' he'd take it down immediately."

"As a favor to who?" Mavis was doubtful.

She went to the window. The thing was gone. She told Jones.

"It's a trick," Jones barked. "It's still pointing at me. I can feel it."

"I tell you, it's not there. I just looked."

"Then he moved it, that's all. He must have set it up again somewhere else—in his shed, I'll bet. I can still feel it on me, like a giant eyeball, grinning."

"Eyeballs don't grin."

"They do in my mind."

Jones lay in the dark, waiting.

He had been waiting when Mavis yawned on her two ticked pillows, put her magazine and her teeth under her lamp, and switched out the light. Now he waited for her breathing to even out and steady, to fall into time with some faraway dreaming sea. Then, cautiously, he rolled out of bed and reached for his pants. A rush of lightheadedness tipped him against the wall, but he set his mind against it and crept like a strangler out through the kitchen and onto the step.

He paused there in the silence to let the crickets start up again.

The thing was gone, all right. He could see that in the thin, graveyard light. But even confirming the fact with his own eyes didn't make him feel any better. Peterson wouldn't give up so easily, he knew. And besides, he still felt too pink around his bones, like an underdone steak, could still feel the irradiating beams and their sickly warmth taking him from rare to medium-well. The thing would be all set up again in Peterson's shed.

Jones would find it and destroy it.

He stumbled going down off the steps into the grass. He found his feet and continued on, squeaking along through the dew and the slugs to the fence at the foot of the yard. Clambering over, he snagged himself on the wire and had to try again.

It was an odd sensation being on Peterson's side of the boundary. Enemy territory—danger! Even the air smelt different. But he kept on until he was pressed right up with his shadow against the wall of Peterson's shed. There were no windows; he would have to edge his way around to the big main doors. He cursed himself for being so weak; he wanted the strength of a giant so that he could tip the shed up like a coffin and peep underneath. But his legs

would scarcely support him; his knees wanted to give way.

He could see it would be tricky getting into the shed. The doors faced Peterson's house, out in the open, in plain view. Still, he reminded himself, Peterson was not the sort to sit up on purpose late into the night. He was probably snoring up a wind in his bed.

Jones reached the corner, held his breath, and rounded it into the open, groping until he felt the hasp of the big doors under his hand. He smiled; there was no proper lock. The doors were secured with a simple wooden crossbar. He grasped one end of the bar and started to lift.

A light flashed on.

An alarm bell screeched.

Jones fell over like a loose stick from the shock.

Peterson materialized, standing over him with a rake, and he heard Mavis closing on them both, pounding heavily out of the night, grand as a ship, her robe streaming behind her like the flag of all distress.

"It's all right, Mrs. Jones, he isn't hurt." Peterson craned his head over Jones, eyeglasses flashing in the glare of the flood lamp like the eyes of some huge squat bird of prey.

Mavis came up puffing, breathless from excitement and her rush through the night. She

loomed above with Peterson.

"What on earth are you doing out here in the dark? What are you up to?" She faced Peterson, as bird-like as he was with her wild, swooping eyes and netted hair, a hawk confronting an owl over a mouse. "He hasn't been well," she explained. "The doctor told you about him. . . . I'll take him home."

Jones heaved himself up by Mavis's robe.

"The hell you will. I'm not going anywhere till I see inside this shed." He turned on Peterson; he felt an urge to smash the little glinting spectacles. "You're still at it, aren't you? Still trying to roast me like a plucked chicken in a pan. I know you. You got your machine all set up again behind these doors, ain't you, Dr. Frankenstein?" He folded his arms. "I'm getting a look inside this shed if I have to fight my way back here every fifteen minutes for the rest of the night."

Peterson blinked sympathy at Mavis. He pulled off his glasses, rubbed them on his sleeve, put them back on again. "Are you sure," he asked Jones, "that you don't want to look under my bed?"

The big wooden doors shuddered slowly outwards, groaning like a Hollywood sound effect; and Jones tottered for-

ward, looking in, the harsh light casting him in a long, Lugosi shadow over the bare floor, among the ancient cobwebs, the bits of rubbish and odd scraps of old lumber; the shed was quite empty.

Mavis helped him away.

Peterson shouted, "I suppose he'll be wanting a look in my attic next. No telling what I might have hidden up there. . ."

Afterwards, when Mavis looked back on that night, she decided that it couldn't have been half an hour later when she woke and sat straight up in bed, her hand on the empty covers that should have held Jones. There was a horrifying shriek on the wind outside.

Then something hit the ground like a barrel of wet sand.

Mavis came out the back door of Peterson's house, balancing two lemon spritzers on a tray. Peterson put down his book and helped himself.

"The way I see it, Mrs. Jones," he said, squinting against the sun and leaning back to punish his lawn chair and point at the roof, "he must have clambered up from the water barrel, got one foot on the ledge of that window, then heaved himself up over the eaves of the porch."

Shading her own eyes, Mavis nodded.

"Then," continued Peterson, "I'd say he just inched up onto the peak of the main roof there and followed the ridge down to the gable-end. Hands and knees, you know. And it must have been when he leaned out over the edge, kind of upside down, trying to peek into the attic window, that he . . ." Peterson extended a sympathetic hand.

Mavis smiled. "I'm all right now, Mr. Peterson. It has been two weeks."

After the funeral they had taken down the fence between the two properties. They sat together now in the silence and the sun. A butterfly wandered past.

Peterson gave a moist blink behind his spectacles and colored a little. He seemed about to say something. He pulled his chair forward. "You'll have to forgive me, but I think you're a very remarkable woman, Mrs. Jones."

"You do?"

"Oh, yes. You've faced up to this tragedy so wonderfully well. You must have tremendous inner strength, the strength to endure things. Very admirable."

Mavis nodded. "Yes."

Encouraged, Peterson continued. "In fact, Mrs. Jones, I find a great deal to admire in you. For instance, although I've never sampled any of your cooking, I'm convinced you must

be the most wonderful cook. You see, I sit here sometimes while you're preparing your dinner there across the way, and if the breeze is just right, it carries to me the most enticing aromas . . . Why, I can often almost taste the delicious meal you're preparing."

Mavis smiled. Men were all alike.

She said, "Yes."

Peterson slapped his round knee. "Mrs. Jones, I want to make you a proposition."

"Hmm."

"Yes. I hope you don't misunderstand me, and I hope I'm not being too forward, but I thought . . . Well, I thought that you and I, instead of eating alone each night, could just as easily take our meals together." He shook himself with a giggle. "Of course, I would bow to your superior culinary skills and come across to your house at meal times, although I would not, I'm afraid, be able to assist with the washing up—my skin, you see, has a condition—but still . . ."

Mavis interrupted. It was time to speak.

"Mr. Peterson. When I was in your house a moment ago mixing the drinks, I gave in to myself and took a peek in your attic. My husband was right. You do have your contraption all set up again, and it's still pointing at our house. I'm won-

dering why you did that, Mr. Peterson—and please don't tell me about the birds."

Peterson's eggshell complexion darkened. He rolled back from Mavis, putting distance between them.

"Mrs. Jones, you've got to believe that machine of mine is harmless—"

"Not so harmless, is it?"

"But I had no idea your husband would attempt to climb my roof in the dead of night. I set up the machine near the window purposely. He'd have seen it from the yard if he'd waited for the daylight. You see, I only wanted to threaten him with it, bargain with him to stop making all that racket. It really is only a dummy. The police said so themselves . . ."

"I was just thinking about the police," Mavis said.

Peterson heaved himself up. He rocked away a step.

"Now just a minute. What I've told you is the truth. There was no intent . . ." He smiled suddenly, like a plaster Buddha. "They'd have to prove that, you know—intent!"

Mavis stirred her spritzer. "I've noticed you've been reading a lot about the South Seas." She nodded at Peterson's book, spread open on the grass beside his chair. "That one there, for example—*Haiti*. I looked up Haiti in my husband's old *National Geographics*. It's an is-

land place. They got voodoo there."

"Mrs. Jones." Again the nervous giggle. "What are you implying?"

"The doctor told me all about voodoo."

"He did?"

"The doctor said my husband was behaving like a man under a curse. Down there,"—she pointed south—"they take a bone or some such thing, and they point it at a man, and they keep on pointing it without stopping, day and night, night and day, and even if he tries to get away it don't help because he knows that bone is out there pointing, all the time pointing, his brain getting more and more fixed on it, until..." She stopped. "But you've read all about it in your books, haven't you?"

She looked at her watch.

"It's getting on towards three. I figure if you pop a roast in now, it ought to be ready for five."

Peterson turned and swayed slowly, stupidly to the stairs. He mounted up. At the top step he paused, staring confusedly down at the sidewalk: perhaps he was thinking that, like the egg man of childhood rhyme, he could end things by toppling to the pavement. Then he bobbed gently in and Mavis heard the rattle of pans.

"I like mine rare," she hol-
lered.

She eased back her chair for more comfort and settled herself. It was wonderfully still and quiet. A robin cocked its head near the rose bush; an oriole perched like a decoration on the old shed; and somewhere nearby a meadowlark sang and sang.

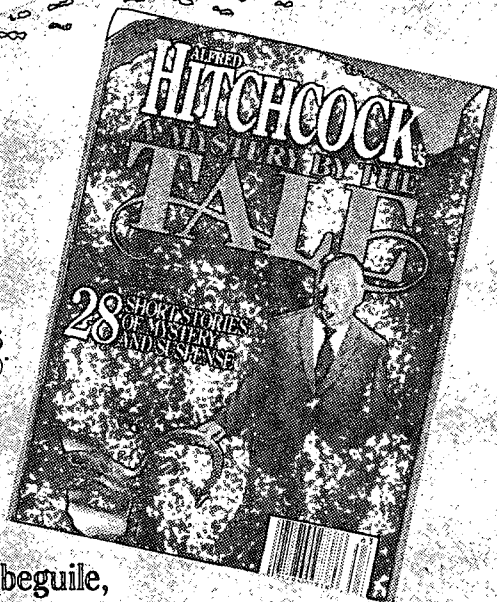
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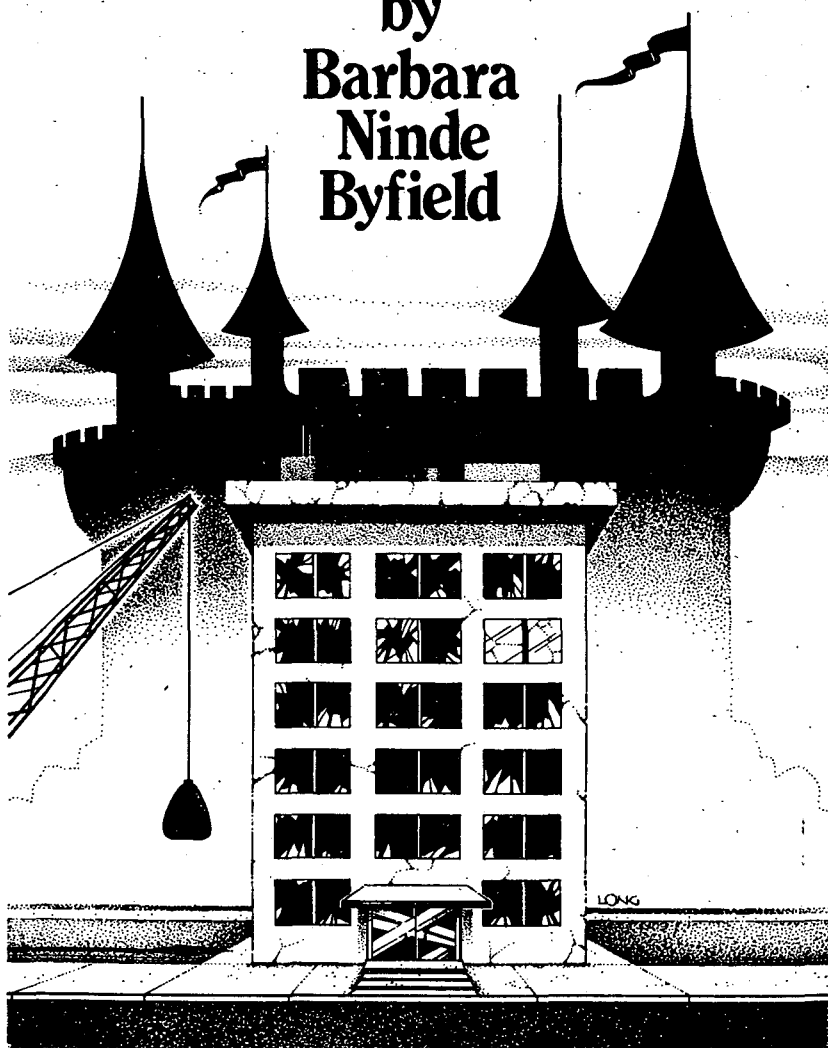
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FICTION

Slippers of Glass

by
**Barbara
Ninde
Byfield**



It ended in death, of course, when the landlord, a city marshall, and a pair of routine policemen broke down the door of the third floor rear "furn.rm.bkt." The rest of the block was almost demolished, the other houses in various stages of rubble.

He was prepared for tears, anger, hysteria from the girl he saw so seldom and who had ignored all the eviction notices for over a year. He was not prepared for the corpse slumped in an armchair, a corpse wearing an ivory satin dress, a cheap little rhinestone crown askew on blonde hair, not prepared for the slim arm in a long white glove dangling, almost touching the dark gun on the floor.

The landlord's houses had been built long ago for prosperous families; even this small back room had a chandelier, long mirrors set in paneling on either side and above the chipped marble fireplace, now bricked up. The French windows with miniature iron balconies had blown open; there was no smell of death except for the chill ghost of oregano, grease, garlic from the restaurant that had once done business on the ground floor. Leaves from an ailanthus tree had blown in from what had once been a garden for the house but was now only an airshaft, closed by a dull wall of kitchen and bathroom windows of a tall apartment house.

Like the body in the chair, there was little in the room, nothing of worth; rats cowered in the bathroom's grime, in the kitchenette behind a Venetian blind. Everything was in subway colors; there was a khaki plastic trash bag full of crumpled magazine cuttings, paper and things. He looked around one last time while the police were carrying the body out; no, nothing of value here, nothing at all.

It began, one could say, on the day Mary Daley had a haircut for the first time since her mother had been assassinated almost a year ago. Randomly shot and killed for a senseless \$64.12 behind the counter of the liquor store where she had worked since Mary was a baby, after her husband died.

It began then, with the hairdresser's scissors flashing like a firefly around the split dead ends of the home permanent her mother had given her. "You don't want it too short, do you? Let's go for a Princess Di—with your long neck and coloring, that's a natural for you." Mary shrugged; her mother had chosen the style always, cut the length, all Mary's life; it had been kept the same through high school and the one semester of business school she had had to leave after the killing.

Denise, who worked in the insurance company's bullpen, had taken her elbow in the elevator after work. "Come on with me, I need a trim and Paul can do you, too, he's never busy on Tuesdays."

"Wow! I'll say you're a twin for Di!" Denise had come out from under her dryer to find ordinary, drab Mary Daley with her blonde hair thick, silken, and the exact replica of Princess Diana's.

"Is it all right? It's kind of different—"

"All *right*? You kidding? It's *terrific*!"

Mary ran the copying machines at the office in a windowless room by herself, quiet except for the whirrings and shirrings of paper, soft clicks of the machines, thumps from the stapler. It was warm, undemanding, snug. When she came out the next day for coffee break, the rest of the girls from the bullpen agreed with Denise, making much over Mary, adding a little blue eye shadow, pink lip gloss, blusher. They had not known how to treat her when she was hired, they knew of the murder, of course, had been told to be extra nice, but Mary had seemed no different from any other dull girl whose life, like so many of theirs, was a young blank slate. Now her resemblance to the princess gave them the hook on which to hang their compassion.

They began to put pictures of Diana in the copying room, taping them on the wall over the long collating and stacking tables. On her birthday at the end of the week—the office was very big on birthdays—on her nineteenth birthday they chipped in and gave her a framed photograph of the princess in full regalia: tiara, pearls, a bit of satin gown showing under a wide blue ribbon pinned to her shoulder with a diamond star, her kid-gloved hand in a low royal wave, eyes slightly down and to one side but twinkling, blue, and a warm white smile.

Mary took the photograph home carefully, an hour's subway ride to desolate Queens. It was her nineteenth birthday but her first alone; after paying for the unexpected haircut she didn't have enough money to eat in a restaurant after all, she took home a pizza, and on a whim bought a kiwi fruit. She had never tasted one but was sure the princess had. It seemed to need peeling, she let the unpleasant skin slither into the empty pizza box, tasted it. She found the green, watery slices tasteless, only faintly sweet and rather gritty, not a "delicacy" at all. She turned back to the photograph; it was beautiful.

It looked best on the mantelpiece; she found herself able to see her reflection and the princess side by side in the big mirror; she

compared her new hair and the touches of makeup the girls had put on her, switched on the chandelier for more light. Yes.

She sat on the floor and went through the bottom drawer of her dresser where she had put the few things of her mother's that were worth saving, or that she didn't dare throw away. She laid the heavy, shabby old handbag aside quickly, not liking to touch it at all. There was her mother's wedding picture, her own high school yearbook; they were put aside, too. The yearbook had been a funny thing for her mother to save—Mary had been absent the day the pictures were taken and she wasn't even in it. She found the small box with earrings, a chain, an old watch, and took out the thin gold ring her mother had sometimes worn. It had a little blue stone set in it, and on Mary's finger it twinkled modestly, as blue as her eyes, as blue as Diana's.

It continued; Denise became engaged and Mary had her hair trimmed for the congratulations dinner from the office girls at the Chinese restaurant, little paper umbrellas in their drinks and what Mary thought "dirty" mottoes in the fortune cookies. Diana must have had a very different celebration. Many of them. A chaste, tender, and reverent kiss on the forehead from her father, her mother's warmest hug and whispered "are you sure, my darling?" The prince glowing with love, perhaps even awe, the ring put on her finger. Mary found herself turning the little gold ring under the tablecloth, glad she had worn her new blouse with the high-banded ruffled neck; only girls with long, lazy necks could wear them, girls like herself, like Princess Diana.

She began, over the next months, to take home magazines with her now, with new pictures of Her, and on the subway one night fell into a recurring reverie. She was no longer *like* Princess Diana, she *was* Princess Diana, riding the Orient Express, perhaps—no, that was too public, and foreign; she was on the private train the Royal Family used to get to—to Balmoral. As it stopped at stations the subway cars emptied, filled less, it was a long ride but at each station the crowds were there with signs, banners, "Bon voyage, Your Highness," "Hi, Di!" all sorts of friendly things, mothers holding up little babies to see her. She could have had a footman, steward, someone draw the shades but that wouldn't be fair to her people, they had stood a long time in the cold waiting for her. The man in the raincoat continued standing directly in front of her but she didn't notice him until the train bucketed, slowed, came into the next to last station. He kicked her foot, flipped open the rain-

coat, exposing himself directly in front of her face, then covered himself and darted, sweating, out the opening door.

But in the mirror, when she got home, and in her own pale, strained face, in the photograph, there was reassurance. She had done nothing to invite that filthiness, she had behaved as well as the princess would have. Perhaps better. Remember the man who'd broken into the very palace itself a few years ago, sat on the queen's bed, smoked a cigarette—no, the queen herself would have approved of her, she had risen above it, well above.

Later that night, when she was on the rim of sleep in the lumpy studio couch, the couple who lived directly above her finished fighting. She had been able many times to blur their yelling and banging out of existence, but not tonight. And never the inevitable love-making afterward, "that thing," as she always thought of it, the creaking springs, moans, hard breathing. She tried harder to be the princess, to whom such things couldn't occur; she fell asleep at last, late and tired, long after the couple upstairs were asleep and snoring and she was cold from the drafty windows.

It continued; months later a saleslady said, "Do try one of these, they're going like hot cakes, and with *your* looks—" The woman laid the heavy blue silk dress across her own bosom. "The collar, with your long neck—spitting image of Di, but I guess you hear that every day; say, there's a skirt and top here that's just the thing too—" Mary wore the dress to the office Christmas party, she liked the cool protection, the rich feeling of the long sleeves silken on her arms, the heavy silk pleated skirt.

She used the last of her mother's insurance money and bought more new clothes, haunted thrift shops and flea markets for little brooches, a pearl choker, long white gloves, a worn lace bedspread for the studio couch. Her landlord had taken to putting eviction notices under her door; the buildings on the block were to be torn down. She found it easy to ignore such things, and didn't go to the tenants' protest meetings, either. She took a month's rent and found an ivory satin ball gown from the fifties, all whaleboned bodice and great full skirt, a dark stain down one side. She spent contented weeks of evening hours remodeling it, re-draping the skirt to one side, adding a fichu. Her old clothes, from school and business college, were thrown away gradually; rough bark-colored synthetic sweaters, shapeless dull skirts.

Two of the windows in her building soon had whitewashed X's on them, and the other houses on the block were emptying, too.

But when she woke in the night it was not to worry, it was to get up, put on her satin gown and the little rhinestone tiara from the bridal finery shop, the gloves, a blue silk ribbon across her bosom with a glittering star on the shoulder, and stand on the tiny iron balcony in the dark, acknowledging with a generous, courteously rehearsed wave the acclamation of the crowd below. She turned slowly from side to side, they had all come to see Her, Her Royal Highness. Once a light in a kitchen directly across the airshaft had burst on, a mother was silhouetted heating a baby's bottle, and She had to duck inside quickly; another night when a fresh gust of cold wind shook wet leaves from the old ailanathus tree and blew them against Her cheek like a rude cold slap, it also knocked down a flowerpot of dead geraniums from the windowsill above, sending it crashing, grazing against Her shoulder.

Huddling in her bed, after she had put away her regalia carefully, she found she was shaking. Shock, said the doctor, attempted assassination is a terrible shock, Your Highness. His nurse put a soothing ointment on the scraped shoulder, the doctor gave Her a sleeping injection and urged Her back into the silk sheets, the fleecy comforter under the velvet canopy high above. She knew the Guards were there, outside, at the door; She began to feel safe again. She must learn to live with terror, vileness, violence. She fell asleep finally, dreaming of her mother's big shabby handbag in the dresser.

The office manager took her vacation, sent them all postcards from London. Mary's was a picture of Diana, of course, "missed seeing crown jewels, Tower closed bcz. bomb threat, but wish you'd seen Changing the Guard!" She put it up on the ever expanding collection of magazine cutouts at home, some fading by now, but the postcard she taped message-side out. The rickety old table held a jigsaw puzzle of The Wedding, coloring books of Diana and Charles, a Princess Doll.

It continued; the yearly sympathy card, the third now that Mary remembered, came from her aunt in Idaho. "I hope you are keeping the Grave up, your mother wouldn't want it should get all weeds." Mary was increasingly conscious of screaming sirens, the horns of firetrucks, ambulances, police cars, almost morbidly waiting for the sounds of disaster, gunshots, crashing airplanes. But only a mild nuisance arose, at least to Her; the office manager called a meeting. The company had been sold to a larger one, some rearrangement of personnel would be inevitable, but—she took Mary

and two other girls aside, assured them of plenty of time, the best references, plenty of new jobs going begging. Mary shrugged, but now when She passed liquor stores She began to straighten her back, slow Her pace, but still She breathed more quickly until they were well behind Her. There were assassins, sometimes Argentin-eans, sometimes Irish, or, quite simply, the mad. They lay in wait for Her.

She dutifully went to the cemetery, this time with a truly royal wreath of flowers, ribbon, greens. She could hear the cameras, the whirl of television, as She bent gracefully, almost in a curtsy, in the neat fitted navy coat, matching kid pumps, and tiny tricorne hat, and put the wreath against the vast marble monument with the three ascending angels cresting it. Swaths of white gravel sloped away from the base; the turf around the stone curb was velvet grass. "Princess Honors Slain Mother's Memory at Grave"—the stories would be in the papers tomorrow. In a year or so She would begin to bring the Boys, the little Princes, but only after the security men had looked into that odd figure in the distance, a rough type with some sort of pack on his back. Her equerry gave his dry, small cough; the press corps formed up, moved back; She walked slowly to the waiting limousine with the little flags fluttering on the front fenders.

The cemetery attendant fiddled with the switch of his noisy leaf-blowing machine, started it as the girl who had left a pot of droopy chrysanthemums on the general's memorial hailed a taxi. Funny, he thought, sucking his teeth, he remembered her from the last couple of years, she was quite a looker, but hadn't she left her flowers on that cheap little stone over the hill where it hardly ever got mowed? Sure she had, the wind always tore them to pieces right away. So today, why the general? Well, no business of his, those dime store mums'd be stolen or busted up by kids before nightfall anyway.

It continued; by Christmas, her third in the back room, by Christmas the landlord had long since stopped having the trash collected outside the apartment doors. Mary took hers down to the sidewalk herself, noticing eventually she must be one of the last tenants, perhaps the very last. Hers was the only trash bag on the curb and some of the houses had broken windows now, doors open or entirely removed. One night she found two men doing "that thing" on the landing outside her door when she came in from work; there was an unmistakable scurry of rats in the building, too, slithering up

the dark stairs, in the walls. The glass in a French window had cracked, leaked rain.

There was no heat, hot water, any more, but she turned on the rusty little oven, wrapped herself in a quilt. She heard prowlers often, even in the daytime; junkies huddled in the empty halls, the homeless took shelter in empty rooms, sleeping on newspapers or filthy rags. Mary was afraid of drunken bangings on her bolted door, blundering feet on the stairs, it was only when she was She that it made no impression.

The office had closed months ago; it was just as well, since she would soon be away on a Royal Tour. Australia, then Canada; she must see to her wardrobe. And to her hair, always, there was enough money for that and for food. The unemployment office was warm; a little dangerous but it was one of Her tiresome duties that could not be delegated. She wore Her fitted coat and little tricorne hat, suede gloves, the guards here at the Hospital for Aged and Retarded Pensioners were in uniform, She could move along the shuffling, odorous line graciously, nod with elegant aplomb as She autographed the hospital's Guest Book and received the usual calligraphed certificate of appreciation from the matron, the matron who stayed safely behind her wire mesh cage and did not, like the princess, have to mingle with the inmates.

Her telephone was cut off; it didn't matter, Her secretary would tell her when there were messages. Her mailbox was broken open long ago but, again, Her staff took care of that sort of thing.

It was almost time. Three of the old houses were already demolished; Mary's room was full all day of the thump and crash of the great wrecking ball, the dust of crumbling brick and mortar. The rats increased, fleeing from vanished shelter to Mary's building, hungry and vicious. The water and electricity were gone, too, Mary bought candles and plastic jugs of mineral water, but it was almost time.

It was time. Night, of course, when she heard the mumbled protestations, pleas, the hoarse bubbling screams outside her door, and moved all the furniture quickly in front of it; the bolt might not hold. Night, and the quick, angry, dangerous sound of a burglar alarm going off across the airshaft, night and the scream of a siren; in the guttering candlelight a pair of rats came, leisurely, out from under the sink and took possession of her bathroom.

It was time. Two candles left, she lit them and pulled her mother's handbag out of the drawer, tumbling it open on the floor, tossing the drab knitting, little coin purse, comb, handkerchief back on her own meaningless yearbook in which there was no picture of her. It was there, black and heavy, in the bottom, the pistol the liquor store owner had given her mother, the pistol she always unloaded before she left the store at night, re-loaded before she opened up in the morning. The one time she had needed it she had been at the other end of the counter, the handbag closed, too far away. The police hadn't opened the bag, had simply given it to Mary with a coat and umbrella and some Rain Totes.

Yes, it was time. She put on the satin gown with deliberate ceremony and ritual; Her little battery-powered cassette player drowned out the urban violence with the Elgar March from Her wedding. She chose jewels, arranged the tiara on Her freshly trimmed hair, drew on the gloves, and draped the large, creaky armchair, pulled back from the barricade at the door to face the long mirrors, with the lace bedspread. She stepped, one satin pump after the other, into Her gold coach, and as it pulled out of the courtyard to the flare of trumpets, furl of flags, tossed flowers from the crowd, She took one last look at the mirrors, smiling at Herself, at Her Royal Highness the Princess Diana, lifted a gloved arm gently to wave, seeing only the beauty, the loveliness, and feeling the love from the people; not seeing the gun in the slowly waving hand, not feeling the assassin's bullet as it entered her heart.

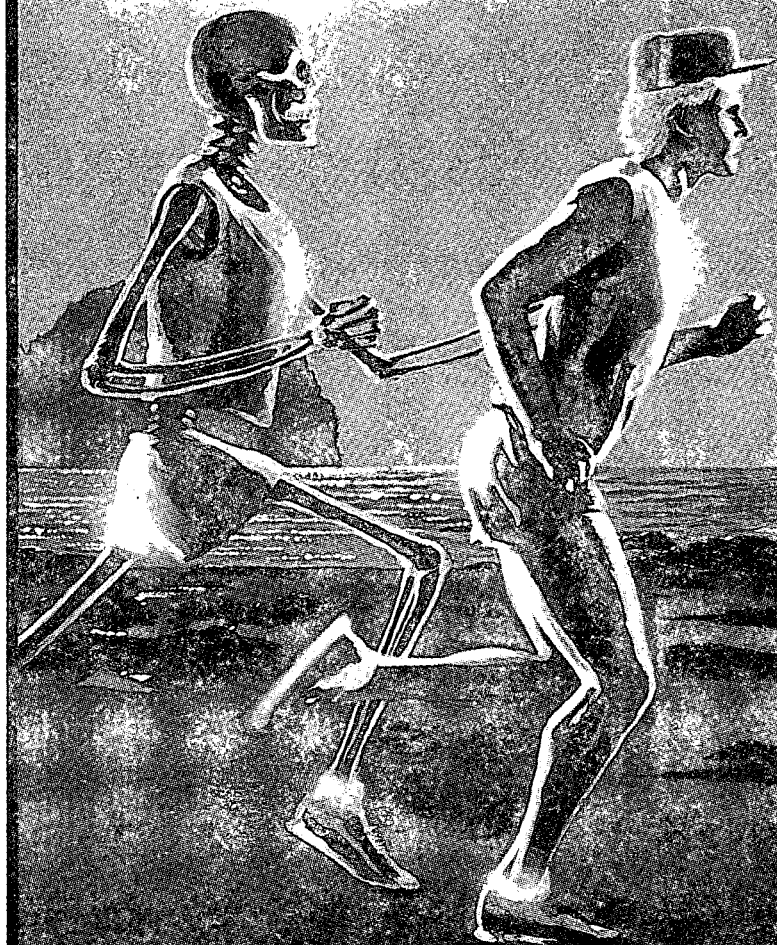
None of the men made any connection then, or ever, between the stiff blonde corpse carried out in a folding chair, face and shoulders wrapped in a graying, bloodstained, torn lace spread, and the photograph on the mantelpiece in a cheap gilt and gesso frame of Princess Diana. Those pictures were a dime a dozen all over town, the smile and the jewels and the blue eyes looking down with a twinkle, down to where the shabby armchair sat, empty. The girl had clearly shot herself, another statistic.

The wrecker crew began on her house the next day, and it was over.

FICTION

Run for Your Life

by William Dolan



The beach was deserted except for the solitary runner who ran so effortlessly he almost seemed to be part of the tide that had just turned and was starting to flow inward. February at New Carolina Beach was still off-season, although the low winter rates brought a fair number of northern retirees to the popular resort's many motels and condominiums. On good days the built-up areas were dotted with strollers in the prime daylight hours. Today, however, was cold and damp. It was late afternoon. And Ed Miller had purposely driven several miles to find an unpeopled area in which to run.

Even at sixty Miller was serious about his running. He had started late, in his thirties, but he had been at it ever since. He had been in the Boston Marathon, the New York Marathon, and a number of lesser races. Although he never had come close to winning, he often finished respectably ahead of the middle of the pack. Today after parking his car he had first jogged for a mile, then run for two, and now he was jogging again. Experience had taught him to know his speed, and an occasional glance at his watch enabled him to compute distance. He had long ago given up

on pedometers. They didn't work for him.

Miller was thinking about the new car he had ordered for his wife for Valentine's Day. It was to be something special, her first new car in eight years and, as best he could remember, her first Valentine gift ever from him. Miller was a good husband, but he often ignored the special days of the year that called for gift-giving. "Crass commercialism," he would say tritely when she needed him. He made up for it by buying her gifts at odd times when he happened upon something he thought she might like.

Miller had wanted to buy Mildred a new car for several years now, but she had refused. She liked the old Chevrolet Caprice, and as she kept pointing out, the new models still had the same body style. Now, however, the paint was badly weathered, especially on the trunk lid, where a great many streaks of rust had appeared as the paint had blistered. There also was a large dent in the right rear fender. Last week the speedometer had quit, requiring two trips to the local dealership, first to have it removed and sent off to be rebuilt, and then to have it reinstalled. While they wandered around the car lot, Mildred saw a car that she

liked. "It's just like the old one!" she enthused, ignoring General Motors' efforts of the last eight years to upgrade the car. "And I love the color." Mildred hadn't cared for the colors of other new Chevrolets since they bought hers.

Ed Miller had his own car, a nearly new small sporty model, but they took the big car when they traveled. He had recently taken semi-retirement from his law practice, hanging on only to a few choice accounts, and they now were spending several months at a rented New Carolina Beach condominium, where the weather was much better than at their home in the western part of the state. He had ordered the new car when he returned alone to have Mildred's speedometer reinstalled. Tomorrow he would take delivery and surprise Mildred with it. That tomorrow happened to be Valentine's Day was fortuitous.

Miller decided that he had run far enough. Darkness would come soon. He always ran either early in the morning or late in the afternoon when the beaches were empty. Today, however, he was later than usual and the light was fading. As he reversed direction, looking in the opposite way along the beach, he noted that there still was no

one in sight. About a mile along on his return he came again to the large drainage pipe he had traversed on the outward leg. The pipe was about three feet in diameter, but it rested on a bed of railroad ties that elevated it to a height of perhaps five feet. It extended forward only about half of the beach's depth, but water was coming out and anyone crossing the beach in front would get wet feet. In the middle of the pipe on either side was a pile of sandbags that formed a kind of ramp, allowing the pipe to be crossed easily. Miller's jog became a run as he approached the drainage pipe. His left foot landed on a sandbag, his right foot on the pipe itself, and he was over. During the instant he was on top of the pipe Miller saw four men crouched on the far side. One held an open attaché case that contained small clear plastic bags filled with white powder. He was extending the case toward the man opposite him who in turn was offering him a large wad of currency.

Miller saw it all in the split second before his left foot hit another sandbag and he was over the drainage pipe, running now at close to top speed. "Get that old guy!" someone yelled, and two men took off after him.

Old guy! Miller thought with annoyance. *I'll show those punks an old guy who can run faster than they can.* All of the four men appeared under forty in the quick glimpse he had of them. They couldn't have had much of a look at him, he knew, but his shaggy, almost pure white hair which showed beneath his cap was a giveaway of his age. Miller kept it that way because he thought it gave him a better courtroom image. He had a head of hair befitting everyone's idea of the ideal judge, a status he long since had stopped hoping to obtain.

Miller was running all out now and after a few seconds he glanced quickly behind to check the pursuit. One man was close and gaining. The other was well behind. It was a two-man race. Miller congratulated himself on today having left off the bulky bottom half of his sweat-suit. The going was easier in just running shorts. *This crook's a runner*, thought Miller, trying to move even faster. *But if he doesn't get me in the next hundred yards, he won't get me at all. I'm a distance man.*

The pursuer almost did get him. Miller sensed someone on top of him and swerved sharply to one side as the lunge came. The man fell and as he did so Miller saw that he was tall,

strongly built, about thirty-five. The man's face was turned and Miller saw it only as a blur. He was wearing a gray sweater, dark slacks, and bright orange jogging shoes.

Orange jogging shoes! Miller opened up a good lead when the man fell, and his mind allowed itself other thoughts than the immediate need to escape. They were running for distance now that the short sprint was over. Miller was confident. *Orange jogging shoes!* Pure orange, unrelieved by trim of another color. He never had seen any like them. Like most joggers, Miller was a jogging shoe freak. He had a closet full. He couldn't go near a shoe store without looking at the jogging shoes, usually trying on a pair or two, and all too often adding another new pair to his collection. Afterward Miller was vague in describing the man, but he could describe the man's shoes perfectly. *Orange jogging shoes!*

Miller's car was parked about two miles from the drainage pipe. He covered the remaining distance at maximum speed, regularly glancing behind to check his pursuer. The man was still there but well behind and losing ground. When he reached his car Miller lost a little time, first as he fumbled with his keys to unlock the

door, and then when the old car wouldn't start right away. When the car finally sped off, Miller saw the man perhaps ten yards behind him. He doubted that his pursuer caught the plate number of the vehicle, of which the man had only a side view, but he must have had a good look at the car itself with its faded gray paint, badly blistered trunk lid, and large dent in the right rear fender.

It wouldn't matter after tomorrow morning, Miller reflected. He'd be getting the new car then, and the salesman had told him that the dealer would have to repaint the car and remove the dent before it could be sold.

Miller went to the police before returning to his condominium. The desk man called the duty sergeant when Miller mentioned drugs. "Are you sure of what you saw?" the sergeant asked skeptically. "After all, you couldn't have had more than a split second to observe those men as you crossed the culvert. You were running at the time. And it was dusk."

"Then why did they chase me?" retorted Miller. "That one man went all out to get me. And he runs very well. Anyone who can catch me has to be a good runner," he added truthfully if without modesty.

The sergeant's glance at Miller's white hair told what he was thinking. Miller looked too old to be much of a runner.

"My hair is prematurely white. I'm only sixty," said Miller. "Furthermore, I've been running seriously for twenty-five years."

"Okay," said the sergeant. "But I think it's more likely that you were chased by plain ordinary muggers. We've had some of them around here. We'll check it out, of course, but those men will be long gone by the time we get to the beach."

Later, at their condominium, Mildred was indignant that the police sergeant should doubt her husband's story, but Miller himself defended the policeman. "As an attorney I've learned to be skeptical of clients' stories. When anything approaching violence is involved, people tend to remember the facts somewhat selectively, in a way that makes themselves look good. On top of that there are all sorts of people, some of them kooks."

"You're not a kook!" Mildred snorted.

"No. I'm just a sixty-year-old guy with white hair who can still run like hell. Come to think of it, some people would say that does make me a kook. But anyway it's over. Tomorrow

row I have to take the car back to the Chevrolet garage," he said, changing the subject. "The rebuilt speedometer is a bit noisy," he lied, not wanting Mildred to know about the new car.

The next day Mildred was delighted with her surprise gift. "And on Valentine's Day, too," she gushed. "Ed, you've finally given me a present on an appropriate occasion."

Miller didn't mention to Mildred his thought that the new car eliminated the off-chance that the men who had chased him might spot the old one and, through it, get to him. Pleasure in the new vehicle took their minds off Miller's adventure. In the next few days they took several short day trips. Miller still jogged and ran, but he found a new place miles away from the old one. The resort area extended for many miles and comprised a number of different communities. He felt reasonably secure in his new running locale. He also wore a different color jogging suit and now always wore the bottom as well as the top.

Less than a week later his sense of security was shattered by a visit from Sergeant Wilcox, the skeptical police sergeant who previously had

interviewed him. Mildred was out shopping at the time.

"I owe you an apology for doubting that you witnessed a drug transaction," the sergeant began.

"You've caught somebody?" Miller asked.

"No, but there's been a new development. Somebody planted a bomb in your old car and it blew up and killed its new owner." Sergeant Wilcox was very matter-of-fact, as if he were speaking about the weather.

"How . . . ? Then . . . ?" Miller was not emotional either by nature or by training, but he showed more emotion than the sergeant. After all, it was his car. He also perceived at once that the dead man could have been him. Worse, Mildred could have been killed.

"It looks like somebody is afraid you might identify him. He must have spotted it somewhere and followed its new owner, who incidentally was an older man with white hair."

"He looked like me?"

"More or less. Apparently enough to fool the man who killed him—or had him killed. Coming up with a bomb and wiring it to the ignition took some professional expertise."

"So we're dealing with organized crime."

"More or less. At the least, we're dealing with ruthless men who will kill to protect their drug trade. They fit the pattern of large scale drug traffickers. When big bucks are involved, they can get very brutal."

"I don't understand how the car was spotted," said Miller. "The car salesman told me it would be repainted and the dent in the right rear fender would be removed."

"I've checked with the dealer," Wilcox replied. "The day after you traded it in they got an 'as is' offer for it. The new owner intended to fix it up himself, but he didn't get the chance."

Miller was glad that his wife was out during the police sergeant's visit. By telling her himself he was able to make it seem a bit less shocking.

"We could leave this area, of course," he said at one point. "We'd lose some money, though, since we've rented our condominium until May and it's only February."

"I'd hate to leave," said Mildred. "The weather here is so much nicer than it is at home. But if there's any real danger . . ."

The police sergeant didn't think so. Miller discussed it with him when he visited the police station to go through the

mug books, checking photos of area criminals who might have been some of the men he had seen.

"It's no good." Miller closed the last of the mug books. "I didn't really get a good look at anyone's face." He laughed wryly. "I'll know those orange jogging shoes if I ever see them again, though."

"If that's the only lead we've got, I suppose we should follow it. I'll have our squad car guys check the shoe stores."

The Millers decided to stay on at the New Carolina Beach. The drug dealers wouldn't be looking for them now, they reasoned. The killers thought they had taken care of the runner on the beach. As a precaution, however, Ed Miller had his shaggy hair cut shorter, and for the first time in his life he started using a coloring compound that turned his white hair nearly back to its original brown.

"You do look younger, Ed," Mildred approved. "And with just a little gray showing at the temples your hair looks very natural."

"Funny thing about lawyers," he replied. "When they're young, they want to look older. But then at a certain age, if they don't make judge, they want to look younger."

"Just like everyone else, dear," said Mildred.

Several days later the police sergeant telephoned Miller. "I think we've found your orange jogging shoes. They're a brand new style that at present is carried by only two area stores."

"That's a break," Miller replied. "Any leads on purchasers?"

"Maybe. Let's you and I go talk to the store managers."

In February the shoe business is slow in resort areas. The two managers actually recalled two customers out of seven sales to date. They remembered them because the shoes retailed for the top-of-the-line price of sixty-five dollars and thus were for the elite trade only. They were aimed at serious joggers, people with foot problems, or just plain people with plenty of money. Five of the sales, including the two the managers remembered, had been by credit card and could be traced. The police set to work doing so, and in the meantime the store managers agreed to pull the orange jogging shoes from their shelves temporarily. The shoes' manufacturer was contacted and promised not to sell any more orange shoes in that area for the next three months. Police in neighboring communities were asked to be on the lookout

for anyone wearing orange jogging shoes. With the sparse off-season population, there was just a chance that this one lead would pay off.

Within a week a policeman from neighboring Bentonville did spot a man wearing orange jogging shoes and took the plate number of his car. The man was found to be one of the credit card purchasers who already had been identified and eliminated as a suspect. He was fifty-eight years old and considerably overweight, definitely not likely to be a fast runner.

One of the other credit card buyers turned out to be a woman who wore a man's size nine shoe. "She actually bought two pairs." Sergeant Wilcox laughed as he told Miller about her, but then a week later he turned serious after one of their men in plain clothes saw her running on the beach. As with the previous suspect, she was tailed until her car plate number could be obtained and she identified.

"She's tall," Sergeant Wilcox told Miller. "Built rather like a man but attractive. And she's a physical fitness enthusiast. She works out at one of the health clubs every weekday afternoon at four. Name's Helen Bartlett."

Wilcox and Miller went to the health club the next day and

observed Helen Bartlett through the plate glass window. "No," said Miller at once. "It definitely was a man and she doesn't look anything like him."

"Are you sure? You said you didn't get a good look at the man who chased you."

"I'm sure. The hair's all wrong. She's too pretty. And she isn't husky enough."

"Except in the feet. But the shoe store guy said that quite a few women wear men's jogging shoes. Feet that big aren't too unusual in women; a man's size nine corresponds to a woman's size eleven."

When Sergeant Wilcox dropped Miller off at his condominium, Miller thanked him for the effort that obviously was being expended on the case.

"Not bad for a small town police department," replied Wilcox. "But it's the slow season here. And we take drug trafficking seriously, especially on the scale you've indicated. Not to mention murder. We've also notified the state police and the federal authorities," he continued. "We want all the help we can get."

"But still the only lead is the orange jogging shoes," said Miller. "That means our best hope is local police spotting the right person wearing them."

"You're right. We've ac-

quired several pairs, courtesy of the manufacturer, and shown them to area police departments so their men will know how they look. We also gave a pair each to the state police and the federal men. We'll keep following that one lead and hope for a break."

"Routine police work but diligently pursued," said Miller. "It's the diligence that I appreciate."

Miller and Wilcox had become quite friendly by this time, and Wilcox continued to keep Miller informed of the progress of the case. Thus Miller learned that two of the three remaining credit card purchasers were eliminated as suspects. One was a nineteen-year-old who attended college several states away. He had bought his shoes in late January near the end of his long mid-year break. He was back at college when Miller had his adventure on the beach.

"Anyway he's too young," Miller told Wilcox. "The man who chased me had to be past thirty."

The next-to-last credit card buyer was thirty-six, but only his age qualified him as a suspect. He not only was a highly respected Baptist minister, he also had a foot deformity which caused him to walk with a slight limp. Obviously he bought

expensive jogging shoes because of his foot problem.

The last credit card buyer was a more likely suspect. He was thirty-two, a jogger, and a minor official in a bank that the federal government had reprimanded for poor banking practices in connection with laundered money. His name was Peter Grogan.

"His bank was lax in reporting large cash sums that it handled," Wilcox told Miller. "That could have nothing to do with this man, but it sure makes him worth checking out."

Miller was hopeful as he and Sergeant Wilcox sat in an unmarked car outside the bank waiting for Peter Grogan to leave on his lunch hour. Then disappointment set in. The suspect was too tall, too thin, too bald.

"I don't think so," Miller said, giving his reasons.

"I thought you said you didn't get a good look at the man." Sergeant Wilcox was unhappy, unwilling to accept failure.

"I got a good enough look to be pretty sure he isn't him," Miller replied.

Sergeant Wilcox remained doubtful until he learned more about Peter Grogan.

"You were right," he told Miller gloomily. "The man moonlights a second job on

weekends. He was working the afternoon you were chased on the beach."

"So that eliminates our five credit card purchasers and accounts for six pairs of jogging shoes."

"We know that there is one more pair that somebody bought for cash, but unless the owner is spotted wearing them we've had it."

"Too bad," said Miller. "With almost all of the orange shoes paid for by credit card, we had the odds in our favor."

"Just bad luck. It happens."

"It shouldn't," Miller persisted. "Seven pairs of shoes sold and six of them accounted for. One of them ought to have been our man."

"Or woman." Wilcox laughed without mirth. "A woman bought two pairs, remember."

"That's another thing. Why should Helen Bartlett want to buy two identical pairs at sixty-five dollars a clip? I'm pretty well off, but I cry when I pay sixty-five dollars for jogging shoes. I buy them so often—all joggers do—that I never buy more than one pair of a given style, even if they're on sale."

Sergeant Wilcox suddenly was very attentive, his eyes widening slightly. "Our lady jogger is an unmarried, school-teacher," he said. "She lives

alone in an apartment for which she has to be paying a pretty good rent. You wouldn't think she'd spend that kind of money on herself."

Miller caught his drift. "You mean the second pair could be a present? His and hers jogging shoes? But both pairs were size nine, and we know she wears that size."

"Precisely. A *man's* size nine. Just suppose she has a boyfriend who jogs and they both wear the same size shoe. Since she's athletically inclined herself, she'd likely be attracted by athletic men."

"Then it just might tickle the lady's fancy to buy two identical pairs and hang the expense."

"Good police work involves checking all the possibilities," said Wilcox. "I'll get back to you."

The next day he did. "We're on to something," he told Miller over the telephone. "The lady does have a boyfriend who jogs. He's a local man, age thirty-seven. He not only jogs but in both high school and college he ran the quarter mile on the track team. Pretty good, too."

"A quarter miler!" exclaimed Miller. "That's the next thing to a sprinter. No wonder he caught up with me. That is, if he's our man."

"He looks like a good bet. He earns his living in real estate, with which he's having financial problems. He's heavily involved in a couple of condominium projects that have gone sour. Recently he paid off a part of what he owes. The money could have come from the drug transaction you witnessed, but he needs more. He still has a special need for the big money."

"Then he could be planning another drug transaction."

"Precisely. We want to put a wiretap on both his house and his office if we can get a judge to let us. We'll stand a better chance of getting approval if you can identify him."

The next noon Miller and Sergeant Wilcox parked near the office of the suspect, whose name was Harry Lofquist. Again they were in an unmarked car.

"That could be the man," Miller said when Lofquist came out of his office and drove off in his Mercedes. "He looks right. I can't be certain," he added. "Remember, I didn't get a good look at his face."

"At least you haven't ruled him out," said Wilcox. "The next step is to ask permission for a wiretap. Stay tuned."

Miller stopped by police headquarters a few days later, unable to contain his curiosity.

"He's wired for sound," Sergeant Wilcox informed him. "His office was tougher to bug than his home, but we had the job done by a federal man who's an expert."

"Does he live alone?" asked Miller.

"Yes. He's divorced. No children. Lives in a townhouse development of which he's the nominal owner. It's heavily mortgaged."

When a week passed with nothing new, Sergeant Wilcox began to sound discouraged. "The judge won't let us run a wiretap forever," he told Miller. "And all the people involved have plenty of other things to do."

The break came suddenly, on a Sunday, which was why Sergeant Wilcox telephoned Miller at once.

"He may have arranged a meet," Wilcox said. "The telephone conversation was somewhat cryptic, which was to be expected, but he seems to be meeting somebody today at Waddell's Inlet. That's about ten miles from here. Want to check it out with me?"

Miller didn't hesitate. "Sure. Just the two of us?"

"More might make them suspicious. Besides, today's Sunday and we're short-handed. Then, too, I'd like you along to

observe the man Harry Lofquist is meeting, to see if you recognize him."

"Sure," said Miller again. "I'll be right down."

"Wear old clothes, and wear a hat."

The only old clothes that Miller had were jogging outfits, so he wore one. It was dark blue in contrast to the light gray he had worn the day he was chased on the beach. He also was careful to wear different colored jogging shoes.

Sergeant Wilcox had on old bluejeans and an ancient sweater. Once more they used an unmarked car, one Wilcox had borrowed, but this time there was a boat trailer attached. On the trailer was a fourteen foot aluminum boat with an eighteen horse outboard motor.

"We're not planning on a car chase," said Wilcox. "This way we'll just look like two guys who are doing something with a boat. If necessary we can unhook the boat in thirty seconds."

The meet was to be outside a restaurant that was closed for the winter and was in the middle of a row of restaurants that were similarly closed. Wilcox and Miller arrived in late afternoon, a half hour ahead of the time scheduled for the meet.

The restaurant was situated directly on the inlet. Behind it was a dock with several small fishing boats beached nearby. Sergeant Wilcox pulled up near the dock, then got out of the car, removed the cover from the outboard motor, and took up a position behind it with a screwdriver and wrenches in his hands. On Wilcox's instruction Miller stayed slouched in the front seat of the car as though sleeping, his hat pulled down to his eyebrows. On the roof of the car Wilcox placed four empty beer cans. Then they waited.

At precisely the appointed hour a car with two men in it drove into the restaurant parking lot and cut its motor. After about five minutes Harry Lofquist's Mercedes pulled alongside the first car. He was alone in the front seat. A few minutes passed as the men in both cars watched Wilcox alternately sip beer and work at changing the spark plugs in his motor. Then the door of Harry Lofquist's Mercedes opened and Lofquist walked casually to the driver's window of the other car. He stood there for about a minute before an exchange was made and he returned to his car. Then both cars drove off.

First both Miller and Wilcox jotted down the plate number

of the unknown car. Then Miller helped Wilcox unhook the boat trailer. "I couldn't see the other two men," said Wilcox, "but their plate number should help."

"Do we try to tail them?" Miller asked.

"No. They'd probably spot us. Our best bet is to check Harry Lofquist's office and home. He'll probably hide the drugs in one place or the other."

Harry Lofquist's office was dark when they arrived, just as the late afternoon light was beginning to fail. There were no cars parked nearby. At Lofquist's townhouse they saw his Mercedes in the driveway and lights on in the house.

"Jackpot!" exclaimed Wilcox. "Or likely enough to justify a search warrant," he added. Then he looked at Miller's jogging outfit. "There's no police radio in this borrowed car, so I'll have to go after the warrant. The judge who authorized the wiretap is expecting the request." Then he added, "Do you think you could stay here and keep an eye on the place until I get back with the warrant and some help? Maybe for an hour?"

"I can't quit now," said Miller, who then took up a station in the doorway of a darkened condominium unit down the street. He hadn't gotten out of the car back at Waddell's Inlet, so he

knew that he hadn't been seen. He felt reasonably secure, especially with his dyed hair that now was just tinged with gray. Still, he couldn't help the cold chill of fear that came over him as soon as he was alone. He was acutely aware of the silence that surrounded him on the deserted street. He worried that the condominium owners would come home and ask what he was doing there.

Twenty uneventful minutes passed as the dusk deepened. There still was some daylight left when Harry Lofquist's front door opened and he emerged wearing jogging clothes. Miller was very frightened then. If Lofquist came toward him he would surely be spotted. There was no place to hide. Miller willed Lofquist to jog in the opposite direction.

When Lofquist reached the end of the walk leading from his front door to the street, he turned in Miller's direction and jogged toward him. As Lofquist approached, Miller instinctively gave an audible kick to the closed door behind him and trotted toward the street, reaching it just as Lofquist came up to him. *Audace, audace, toujours de l'audace*, he was thinking, recalling the paraphrase of Georges Jacques Danton by George C. Scott in the movie

Patton. There was nothing to do now but brazen it out, even though the author of the remark had lost his head in the French Revolution.

"Good evening," he said. "Nice night for exercise." He noticed that Lofquist wore orange jogging shoes.

"You new around here?" asked Lofquist. "I thought I was the only jogger in the neighborhood."

"Just moved in," Miller lied. "Name's Fred Baxter." Miller was not about to give his real name to the man who had tried to have him killed.

"Mine's Harry Lofquist. Those condo units you're in have had a fair turnover."

They were jogging side by side now, both men moving effortlessly. When they reached a corner, Miller dropped a few steps behind and conversation ceased. For half an hour they ran the all but deserted streets, Miller following as Lofquist led the way through the quiet residential area. Dusk became darkness but visibility was fairly good because of the evenly spaced streetlights. There were no sidewalks or curbs, and they ran along the edge of the road.

Several times Harry Lofquist glanced over his shoulder to see if his new acquaintance was still with him. Ten minutes into

the run he stepped up the pace a notch. Finding Miller still there another ten minutes later, he again increased their speed, continuing to run rapidly until finally he led them in a circular route back to his own front door. There was no sign of a police car outside.

"You really can run," he said admiringly then. "Come on in and have a drink."

"I could use a beer," Miller replied, not knowing what else to say. At the same time he was emboldened by his successful handling of Lofquist thus far. If he refused and Lofquist watched him return to the condominium where they had met, he would become suspicious when Miller failed to gain entrance.

"Sit down," Lofquist said as they entered his living room. He went into the kitchen but returned a moment later. In his hand he held a small gun which he pointed at Miller.

"All right, whoever you are. Tell me how you got on to me before I blow your head off."

Miller had no difficulty acting startled. "Wha . . . what do you mean?" he stammered.

"Don't stall," Lofquist snarled. "This is the second time in a row that I've met a top grade runner on the day I made a drug buy. You just gave your-

self away out there, friend. I didn't get too good a look at you the first time, but you're the same guy all right. We thought we had taken care of you." Then he added, "You cut your hair, didn't you? And you dyed it."

"Really, I . . ." Miller tried for time, hoping that the police would appear at the front door.

"I suppose it doesn't matter how you got here," Lofquist said, talking to himself as much as to Miller. "The important thing is for me to get rid of you fast along with the drugs." He raised the gun slightly.

"Drop it, Lofquist." Sergeant Wilcox and two other policemen came out of a back room. All had weapons in their hands. Wilcox also carried an attaché case that was identical to the case full of drugs Miller had seen that first day on the beach.

Lofquist stood frozen for a moment, then recognized that he was through and surrendered meekly.

The rest was routine. Lofquist was read his rights after being arrested and was led away.

"Why wasn't your car out front?" Miller asked Sergeant Wilcox the next day when there was time to talk.

"It was when we first arrived," Wilcox answered with

a grin. "But we moved it after we found both you and Lofquist gone. We didn't want to frighten Lofquist away when he came back. We were hoping there would be some incriminating conversation after you two got back from running. There was, and it's all on tape."

"What about the men who sold the drugs?"

"We know who they are. We traced them through their car plate number. Lofquist is co-operating with us in an effort to mitigate his own sentence. We'll get them. Lofquist already has given us the fourth

man who was with him the day he chased you."

"Then it's about over," said Miller.

"Just about. How would you like a free pair of orange jogging shoes? We acquired a number of pairs, remember, to show around to the different police authorities. We have your size."

"I probably should say no," Miller answered. "Orange is just too distinctive a color. But what the hell, I'll take them. After all, they do go for sixty-five dollars a pair. And I've earned them."

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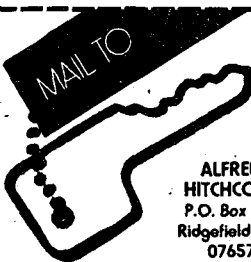
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In the Fog

(Part II)

by Richard Harding Davis

SYNOPSIS OF PART I: THE STORY OF THE NAVAL ATTACHE

On the night after the great London fog of 1897, five men are sitting in the exclusive Grill Club. All are strangers to each other. One of them is a baronet, Sir Andrew, taking a break from Parliament, at which he is arguing for a bill to spend more money on the British Navy. Sir Andrew's one weakness is his passion for mysteries; he's reading one in the corner of the club. Another club member, a man with a black pearl stud, tells the other three that he is bitterly opposed to the navy bill. Sir Andrew's influence, however, is so great that once he speaks in favor of it, it is sure to pass. Sir Andrew finishes his book and gets up to leave, and just at that moment, one of the other men, an American naval attaché, begins to tell an intriguing story. The night before, the attaché says, he had been lost in the fog. Seeing an open doorway and a man silhouetted in the light, he made for the house to ask directions. But the man ran out past him and into the fog without a word. The attaché, Lieutenant Ripley Sears, pushed open the door of the house and went in. Asleep near the stairs was a servant dressed in Russian clothing. Sears waited in a drawing room while the servant fetched his mistress, "the princess." Suddenly he realized that he wasn't alone in the room; he could see a man's hand on the arm of a couch in a curtained alcove. Pulling the curtain aside, he discovered that the hand belonged to a corpse. In the dining room, Sears found another corpse—a beautiful woman, without doubt the Russian princess. The calling-cards of two Englishmen were on the tray in the hall: One, obviously that of the dead man, identified him as the African explorer, the Earl of Chetney, who had been presumed dead in Africa until his newsmaking return to London that day. The other card belonged to Chetney's younger brother Arthur. Sears left in search of the police, but wandered in the fog for some time before finding a constable. The police know of Chetney's infatuation with the notorious Princess Zichy, for which his father had disinherited him. Chetney had gone to Africa, and his brother Arthur had run up huge gambling debts in his absence. The police speculate that when the older brother returned, Arthur appealed in vain for money and then killed his brother to be sure the inheritance didn't revert to him. He killed the princess as a witness, and then disappeared. No one knows the exact address of the Princess Zichy's house; the police are searching both for the killer and for the silent house with two dead bodies somewhere in metropolitan London.

Sir Andrew rises at the conclusion of the story and is again about to leave for Parliament, when one of the other men reveals that he had known the Princess Zichy, and that she had once tried to rob him of the czarina's diamonds.

Part II. THE STORY OF THE QUEEN'S MESSENGER.

“**T**he necklace was a present from the queen of England to the czarina of Russia,” began the Queen’s Messenger. “It was to celebrate the occasion of the czar’s coronation. Our Foreign Office knew that the Russian ambassador in Paris was to proceed to Moscow for that ceremony, and I was directed to go to Paris and turn over the necklace to him. But when I reached Paris I found he had not expected me for a week later, and was taking a few days’ vacation at Nice. His people asked me to leave the necklace with them at the embassy, but I had been charged to get a receipt for it from the ambassador himself, so I started at once for Nice. The fact that Montè Carlo is not two thousand miles from Nice may have had something to do with making me carry out my instructions so carefully.

“Now, how the Princess Zichy came to find out about the necklace, I don’t know, but I can guess. As you have just heard, she was at one time a spy in the service of the Russian government. And after they dismissed her she kept up her acquaintance with many of the Russian agents in London. It was probably through one of them that she learned that the necklace was to be sent to Moscow, and which of the Queen’s Messengers had been detailed to take it there. Still, I doubt if even that knowledge would have helped her if she had not also known something which I supposed no one else in the world knew but myself and one other man. And, curiously enough, the other man was a Queen’s Messenger, too, and a friend of mine. You must know that up to the time of this robbery I had always concealed my dispatches in a manner peculiarly my own. I got the idea from that play called ‘A Scrap of Paper.’ In it a man wants to hide a certain compromising document. He knows that all his rooms will be secretly searched for it, so he puts it in a torn envelope and sticks it up where anyone can see it on his mantelshelf. The result is that the woman who is ransacking the house to find it looks in all the unlikely places, but passes over the scrap of paper that is just under her nose. Sometimes the papers and packages they give us to carry about Europe are of very great value, and sometimes they are special makes of cigarettes and orders to Court dressmakers. Sometimes we know what we are carrying, and sometimes we do not. If it is a large sum of money or a treaty, they generally tell us. But as a rule we have no knowledge of what the package contains; so, to be on the safe

side, we naturally take just as great care of it as though we knew it held the terms of an ultimatum or the crown jewels. As a rule, my *confrères* carry the official packages in a dispatch box, which is just as obvious as a lady's jewel bag in the hands of her maid. Everyone knows they are carrying something of value. They put a premium on dishonesty. Well, after I saw the 'Scrap of Paper' play, I determined to put the government valuables in the most unlikely place that anyone would look for them. So I used to hide the documents they gave me inside my riding boots, and small articles, like money or jewels, I carried in an old cigar case. After I took to using my case for that purpose, I bought a new one, exactly like it, for my cigars. But to avoid mistakes, I had my initials placed on both sides of the new one, and the moment I touched the case, even in the dark, I could tell which it was by the raised initials.

"No one knew about this except the Queen's Messenger of whom I spoke. We once left Paris together on the Orient Express. I was going to Constantinople, and he was to stop off at Vienna. On the journey I told him of my peculiar way of hiding things, and showed him my cigar case. If I recollect rightly, on that trip it held the Grand Cross of St. Michael and St. George, which the queen was sending to our ambassador. The Messenger was very much entertained at my scheme, and some months later when he met the princess he told her about it as an amusing story. Of course, he had no idea she was a Russian spy. He didn't know anything at all about her, except that she was a very attractive woman. It was indiscreet, but he could not possibly have guessed that she could ever make any use of what he told her.

"Later, after the robbery, I remembered that I had informed this young chap of my secret hiding place, and when I saw him again I asked him about it. He was greatly distressed and said he had never seen the importance of the secret. He remembered he had told several people of it, and among others the Princess Zichy. In that way I found out that it was she who had robbed me, and I know that from the moment I left London she was following me, and that she knew then that the diamonds were concealed in my cigar case.

"My train for Nice left Paris at ten in the morning. When I travel at night I generally tell the *chef de gare* that I am a Queen's Messenger, and he gives me a compartment to myself. But in the daytime I take whatever offers. On this morning I had found an

empty compartment, and I had tipped the guard to keep everyone else out, not from any fear of losing the diamonds but because I wanted to smoke. He had locked the door, and as the last bell had rung, I supposed I was to travel alone, so I began to arrange my traps and make myself comfortable. The diamonds in the cigar case were in the inside pocket of my waistcoat, and as they made a bulky package I took them out, intending to put them in my handbag. It is a small satchel like a bookmaker's, or those handbags that couriers carry. I wear it slung from a strap across my shoulder, and, no matter whether I am sitting or walking, it never leaves me.

"I took the cigar case which held the necklace from my inside pocket, and the case which held the cigars out of the satchel, and while I was searching through it for a box of matches I laid the two cases beside me on the seat.

"At that moment the train started, but at the same instant there was a rattle at the lock of the compartment, and a couple of porters lifted and shoved a woman through the door and hurled her rugs and umbrellas in after her.

"Instinctively I reached for the diamonds. I shoved them quickly into the satchel, and, pushing them far down to the bottom of the bag, snapped the spring lock. Then I put the cigars in the pocket of my coat, but with the thought that now that I had a woman as a traveling companion, I should probably not be allowed to enjoy them.

"One of her pieces of luggage had fallen at my feet, and a roll of rugs had landed at my side. I thought if I hid the fact that the lady was not welcome, and at once started to be civil, she might permit me to smoke. So I picked her handbag off the floor and asked her where I might place it.

"As I spoke I looked at her for the first time and saw that she was a most remarkably handsome woman.

"She smiled charmingly and begged me not to disturb myself. Then she arranged her own things about her and, opening her dressing bag, took out a gold cigarette case.

"Do you object to smoke?" she asked.

"I laughed and assured her I had been in great terror lest she might not allow me to smoke.

"If you like cigarettes," she said, "will you try some of these? They are rolled especially for my husband in Russia, and they are supposed to be very good."

"I thanked her and took one from her case, and I found it so much better than my own that I continued to smoke her cigarettes throughout the rest of the journey. I must say that we got on very well. I judged from the coronet on her cigarette case, and from her manner, which was quite as well bred as that of any woman I ever met, that she was someone of importance, and though she seemed almost too goodlooking to be respectable, I determined that she was some *grande dame* who was so assured of her position that she could afford to be unconventional. At first she read her novel, and then she made some comment on the scenery, and finally we began to discuss the current politics of the Continent. She talked of all the cities in Europe and seemed to know everyone worth knowing. But she volunteered nothing about herself except that she frequently made use of the expression, 'When my husband was stationed at Vienna,' or, 'When my husband was promoted to Rome.' Once she said to me, 'I have often seen you at Monte Carlo. I saw you when you won the pigeon championship.' I told her that I was not a pigeon shot, and she gave a little start of surprise. 'Oh! I beg your pardon,' she said, 'I thought you were Morton Hamilton, the English champion.' As a matter of fact, I do look something like Hamilton, but I know now that her object was to make me think that she had no idea as to who I really was. She needn't have acted at all, for I certainly had no suspicions, and was only too pleased to have so charming a companion.

"The one thing that should have made me suspicious was the fact that at every station she made some trivial excuse to get me out of the compartment. She pretended that her maid was traveling behind us in one of the second-class carriages, and kept saying she could not imagine why the woman did not come to look after her; and if the maid did not turn up at the next stop, would I be so very kind as to get out and bring her whatever it was she pretended she wanted?

"I had taken my dressing case from the rack to get out a novel, and had left it on the seat opposite to mine, and at the end of the compartment furthest from her. And once when I came back from buying her a cup of chocolate, or from some other fool errand, I found her standing at my end of the compartment with both hands on the dressing bag. She looked at me without so much as winking an eye, and shoved the case carefully into a corner. 'Your bag slipped off on the floor,' she said. 'If you've got any bottles in it, you had better look and see that they're not broken.'

"And I give you my word, I was such an ass that I did open the case and look all through it. She must have thought I *was* a Juggins. I get hot all over whenever I remember it. But in spite of my dullness, and her cleverness, she couldn't gain anything by sending me away because what she wanted was in the handbag, and every time she sent me away the handbag went with me.

"After the incident of the dressing case her manner began to change. Either she had had time to look through it in my absence, or, when I was examining it for broken bottles, she had seen everything it held.

"From that moment she must have been certain that the cigar case in which she knew I carried the diamonds was in the bag that was fastened to my body, and from that time on she probably was plotting how to get it from me.

"Her anxiety became most apparent. She dropped the great lady manner, and her charming condescension went with it. She ceased talking, and, when I spoke, answered me irritably or at random. No doubt her mind was entirely occupied with her plan. The end of our journey was drawing rapidly nearer, and her time for action was being cut down with the speed of the express train. Even I, unsuspecting as I was, noticed that something was very wrong with her. I really believe that before we reached Marseilles, if I had not, through my own stupidity, given her the chance she wanted, she might have stuck a knife in me and rolled me out on the rails. But as it was, I only thought that the long journey had tired her. I suggested that it was a very tedious trip, and asked her if she would allow me to offer her some of my cognac.

"She thanked me and said 'No,' and then suddenly her eyes lighted, and she exclaimed, 'Yes, thank you, if you will be so kind.'

"My flask was in the handbag, and I placed it on my lap, and with my thumb I slipped back the catch. As I keep my tickets and railroad guide in the bag, I am so constantly opening it that I never bother to lock it, and the fact that it is strapped to me has always been sufficient protection. But I can appreciate now what a satisfaction, and what a torment, too, it must have been to that woman when she saw that the bag opened without a key.

"While we were crossing the mountains I had felt rather chilly, and had been wearing a light racing coat. But after the lamps were lighted the compartment became very hot and stuffy, and I found the coat uncomfortable. So I stood up, and, after first slipping the strap of the bag over my head, I placed the bag in the seat next me

and pulled off the racing coat. I don't blame myself for being careless; the bag was still within reach of my hand, and nothing would have happened if at that exact moment the train had not stopped at Arles. It was the combination of my removing the bag and our entering the station at the same instant which gave the Princess Zichy the chance she wanted to rob me.

"I needn't say that she was clever enough to take it. The train ran in the station at full speed and came to a sudden stop. I had just thrown my coat into the rack, and had reached out my hand for the bag. In another instant I should have had the strap around my shoulder. But at that moment the princess threw open the door of the compartment and beckoned wildly at the people on the platform. 'Natalie!' she called. 'Natalie! here I am. Come here! This way!' She turned upon me in the greatest excitement. 'My maid!' she cried. 'She is looking for me. She passed the window without seeing me. Go, please, and bring her back.' She continued pointing out of the door and beckoning me with her other hand. There certainly was something about that woman's tone which made one jump. When she was giving orders, you had no chance to think of anything else. So I rushed out on my errand of mercy, and then rushed back again to ask what the maid looked like.

"'In black,' she answered, rising and blocking the door of the compartment. 'All in black, with a bonnet!'

"The train waited three minutes at Arles, and in that time I suppose I must have rushed up to over twenty women and asked, 'Are you Natalie?' The only reason I wasn't punched with an umbrella or handed over to the *gendarme* must have been that they probably thought I was crazy.

"When I jumped back into the compartment the princess was seated where I had left her, but her eyes were burning with happiness. She placed her hand on my arm almost affectionately and said in a most hysterical way, 'You are very kind to me. I am so sorry to have troubled you.'

"I protested that every woman on the platform was dressed in black.

"'Indeed, I am so sorry,' she said, laughing; and she continued to laugh until she began to breathe so quickly that I thought she was going to faint.

"I can see now that the last part of that journey must have been a terrible half hour for her: She had the cigar case safe enough, but she knew that she herself was not safe. She knew if I were to open

my bag, even at the last minute; and miss the case, I should know positively that she had taken it. I had placed the diamonds in the bag at the very moment she entered the compartment, and no one but our two selves had occupied it since. She knew that when we reached Marseilles she would either be twenty thousand pounds richer than when she left Paris, or that she would go to jail. That was the situation as she must have read it, and I don't envy her her state of mind during that last half hour. It must have been hell.

"I saw that something was wrong, and in my innocence I even wondered if possibly my cognac had not been a little too strong. For she suddenly developed into a most brilliant conversationalist, and applauded and laughed at everything even I said, firing off questions at me like a machine gun, so that I had no time to think of anything else but of what she was saying. Whenever I stirred, she stopped her chattering and leaned toward me, and watched me like a cat over a mouse hole. I wondered how I could have considered her an agreeable traveling companion. I thought I should have preferred to be locked in with a lunatic. I don't like to think how she would have acted if I had made a move to examine the bag, but as I had it safely strapped around me again, I did not open it, and I reached Marseilles alive. As we drew into the station she shook hands with me and grinned at me like a Cheshire cat.

"I cannot tell you," she said, "how much I have to thank you for." What do you think of that for impudence?

"I offered to put her in a carriage, but she said she must find Natalie, and that she hoped we should meet again at the hotel. So I drove off by myself, wondering who she was, and whether Natalie was not her keeper.

"I had to wait several hours for the train to Nice, and as I wanted to stroll around the city, I thought I had better put the diamonds in the safe of the hotel. As soon as I reached my room I locked the door, placed the handbag on the table and opened it. I felt among the things at the top of it, but failed to touch the cigar case. I shoved my hand in deeper and stirred the things about, but still I did not reach it. A cold wave swept down my spine, and a sort of emptiness came to the pit of my stomach. Then I turned red hot and the sweat sprang out all over me. I wetted my lips with my tongue and said to myself, 'Don't be an ass! Pull yourself together, pull yourself together. Take the things out, one at a time. It's there, of course it's there. Don't be an ass!'

"So I put a brake on my nerves and began very carefully to pick out the things one by one, but after five seconds I could not stand it another instant, and I rushed across the room and threw out everything on the bed; but the diamonds were not among them. I pulled the things about and tore them open and shuffled and rearranged and sorted them, but it was no use. The cigar case was gone. I threw everything in the dressing case out on the floor, although I knew it was useless to look for it there. I knew that I had put it in the bag. I sat down and tried to think. I remembered I had put it in the satchel at Paris just as that woman had entered the compartment, and I had been alone with her ever since, so it was she who had robbed me. But how? It had never left my shoulder. And then I remembered that it had—that I had taken it off when I had changed my coat and for the few moments that I was searching for Natalie. I remembered that the woman had sent me on that goose-chase, and at every other station she had tried to get rid of me on some fool errand.

"I gave a roar like a mad bull and I jumped down the stairs six steps at a time.

"I demanded at the office if a distinguished lady traveler, possibly a Russian, had just entered the hotel.

"As I expected, she had not. I sprang into a cab and inquired at two other hotels, and then I saw the folly of trying to catch her without outside help, and I ordered the fellow to gallop to the office of the chief of police. I told my story, and the ass in charge asked me to calm myself and wanted to take notes. I told him this was no time for taking notes, but for doing something. He got wrathful at that, and I demanded to be taken at once to his chief. The chief, he said, was very busy and could not see me. So I showed him my silver greyhound. In eleven years I had never used it but once before. I stated in pretty vigorous language that I was a Queen's Messenger, and that if the chief of police did not see me instantly he would lose his official head. The fellow jumped off his high horse at that and ran with me to his chief—a smart young chap, a colonel in the army, and a very intelligent man.

"I explained that I had been robbed in a French railway carriage of a diamond necklace belonging to the queen of England, which Her Majesty was sending as a present to the czarina of Russia. I pointed out to him that if he succeeded in capturing the thief, he would be made for life and would receive the gratitude of three great powers.

"He wasn't the sort that thinks second thoughts are best. He saw Russian and French decorations sprouting all over his chest, and he hit a bell and pressed buttons and yelled out orders like the captain of a penny steamer in a fog. He sent her description to all the city gates, and ordered all cabmen and railway porters to search all trains leaving Marseilles. He ordered all passengers on outgoing vessels to be examined, and telegraphed the proprietors of every hotel and pension to send him a complete list of their guests within the hour. While I was standing there he must have given at least a hundred orders, and sent out enough *commissaires*, *sergents de ville*, *gendarmes*, bicycle police, and plainclothes Johnnies to have captured the entire German army. When they had gone he assured me that the woman was as good as arrested already. Indeed, officially, she was arrested; for she had no more chance of escape from Marseilles than from the Château D'If.

"He told me to return to my hotel and possess my soul in peace. Within an hour he assured me he would acquaint me with her arrest.

"I thanked him, and complimented him on his energy, and left him. I felt that she was a very clever woman and a match for any and all of us. It was all very well for him to be jubilant. He had not lost the diamonds, and had everything to gain if he found them; while I, even if he did recover the necklace, should only be where I was before I lost it, and if he did not recover it I was a ruined man. It was an awful fiasco for me. I had always prided myself on my record. In eleven years I had never mislaid an envelope nor missed taking the first train. And now I had failed in the most important commission that had ever been entrusted to me. And it wasn't a thing that could be hushed up, either. It was too conspicuous, too spectacular. It was sure to invite the widest notoriety. I saw myself ridiculed all over the Continent, and perhaps dismissed, even suspected of having taken the thing myself.

"I was walking in front of a lighted cafe, and I felt so sick and miserable that I stopped for a pick-me-up. Then I considered that if I took one drink I should probably, in my present state of mind, not want to stop under twenty, and I decided I had better leave it alone. But my nerves were jumping like those of a frightened rabbit, and I felt I must have something to quiet them or I should go crazy. I reached for my cigarette case, but a cigarette seemed hardly adequate, so I put it back again and took out this cigar case, in which I keep only the strongest and blackest cigars. I opened it and

stuck in my fingers, but instead of a cigar they touched a thin leather envelope. My heart stood perfectly still. I did not dare to look, but I dug my fingernails into the letter and I felt layers of thin paper, then a layer of cotton, and then they scratched on the facets of the czarina's diamonds!

"I stumbled as though I had been hit in the face and fell back into one of the chairs on the pavement. I tore off the wrappings and spread out the diamonds on the cafe table; I could not believe they were real. I twisted the necklace between my fingers, and crushed it between my palms, and tossed it up in the air. I believe I almost kissed it. The women in the cafe stood up on the chairs to see better, and laughed and screamed, and the people crowded so close around me that the waiters had to form a bodyguard. The proprietor thought there was a fight and called for the police. I was so happy I didn't care. I laughed, too, and gave the proprietor a handful of coin and told him to stand everyone a drink. Then I tumbled into a *fiacre* and galloped off to my friend the chief of police. I felt very sorry for him. He had been so happy at the chance I had given him, and he would be so disappointed when he learned I had sent him off on a false alarm.

"But now that I had the necklace I did not want him to find the woman. Indeed, I was most anxious that she should get clear away. For if she were caught, the truth would come out, and I was likely to get a sharp reprimand, and sure to be laughed at.

"I could see now how it had happened. In my haste to hide the diamonds when the woman was hustled into the carriage I had shoved the cigars into the satchel and the diamonds into the pocket of my coat. Now that I had the diamonds safe again it seemed a very natural mistake. But I doubted if the Foreign Office would think so. I was afraid it might not appreciate the beautiful simplicity of my secret hiding place. So, when I reached the police station and found the princess still at large, I was more than relieved.

"As I expected, the chief was extremely chagrined when he learned of my mistake and that there was nothing for him to do. But I was feeling so happy myself that I hated to have anyone else miserable, so I suggested that this attempt to steal the czarina's necklace might be only the first of a series of such attempts, and that I might be still in danger from an unscrupulous gang.

"I winked at the chief and the chief smiled at me, and we went to Nice together in a saloon car with a guard of twelve carabinieri

and twelve plainclothes men, and the chief and I drank champagne all the way. We marched together up to the hotel where the Russian ambassador was stopping, closely surrounded by our escort of carabineers, and delivered the necklace with the most profound ceremony. The old ambassador was immensely impressed, and when we hinted that already I had been made the object of an attack by robbers, he assured us that His Imperial Majesty would not prove ungrateful.

"I wrote a swinging personal letter about the invaluable services of the chief to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, and they gave him enough Russian and French medals to satisfy even a French soldier. So, though he never caught the woman, he received his just reward."

The Queen's Messenger paused and surveyed the faces of those about him in some embarrassment.

"But the worst of it is," he added, "that the story must have got about; for, while the princess obtained nothing from me but a cigar case and five excellent cigars, a few weeks after the coronation the czar sent me a gold cigar case with his monogram in diamonds. And I don't know yet whether that was a coincidence, or whether the czar wanted me to know that he knew that I had been carrying the czarina's diamonds in my pigskin cigar case. What do you fellows think?"

(To be concluded in the December issue)

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

Illustration by Sheila Smith



Several dozen fine writers have been profiled in these pages in the past few years, and I'm pleased to report new books in several of their series.

Robert Parker's ever-growing mob of fans won't be surprised to hear me report that Spenser's latest adventure, **Taming a Seahorse**, is now available in hardcover (Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, \$15.95, 250 pp.). Most of Spenser's old buddies play supporting roles, though we see less of Hawk and girlfriend Susan than we did in the last book (and I can't say I'm sorry about it, either). If you're a real Spenser fan, you'll even be interested in knowing that the quest centers around April Kyle, a teenage prostitute whom Spenser has rescued once before (see *Ceremony*). So all the ingredients we've come to expect in a Parker novel are here: the very special characters, especially the surprising Spenser himself; the very real, very scary danger which Spenser competently parries; the spark of innocence that's always there to redeem the otherwise grimly contemporary world of drugs, sex, and money that Spenser is led into by his investigations. These novels aren't for the squeamish, but Parker does lend humanity to the scene. And Spenser is, after all, a pretty special guy.

Very different are the medieval mysteries by Ellis Peters, whose protagonist is an ex-Crusader who has retired to the monastery. The place is England, near the Welsh border, birthplace of Brother

Cadfael, our hero. The time is the twelfth century, when the country is caught in a royal struggle between two cousins who claim the British throne. That civil strife is always beneath the surface, or just around the bend; and this latest book in the series, aptly called **An Excellent Mystery** (Morrow, \$15.95, 190 pp.), begins with the sudden appearance of two fellow Benedictines whose home abbey has been burned to the ground in a battle. The bond between the two brothers—one older, patrician, dying, the other young and mute—cannot help but arouse Brother Cadfael's keen curiosity. But it is no matter for his unique intuition and investigative knack, not in the way a missing heiress is, a girl whom they begin to believe has been murdered on her way to the nunnery. If you've not experienced Cadfael's world—the sense of daily living in the cloister and the town beyond, the peace to be found in Cadfael's herbarium and darkened workshop, the drama of life-and-death struggles in an age when traveling even a short distance was fraught with danger—then sample this, the eleventh in the Cadfael series. You will be rewarded with some gentle pastoral scenes, some very memorable folk, and a neat plot with a surprise at its heart.

Another entry by a writer who was a profile subject is Amanda Cross's **No Word from Winifred** (Dutton, \$14.95, 217 pp.). As you may know, an Amanda Cross mystery means another adventure featuring Kate Fansler, a professor of English at a prestigious Manhattan college, a woman of middle years blessed with curiosity, rare intelligence, and an even rarer (especially in many mystery series) sense of humor. As a favor to an old friend and to her young niece, Kate agrees to do a little investigating of the alleged disappearance of a solitary woman, Winifred Ashby. The special pleasures of *No Word from Winifred* are to be found in other places than in the plot, however: in Winifred's diary, for instance, which she has left behind, and which is given to Kate in the hopes that it might contain some clue to the writer's disappearance. Like Kate, the reader cannot help but be drawn to Winifred, a woman of exceptional integrity, resilience, character. Other joys are to be found in their usual spots, usual for an Amanda Cross mystery, that is: in the very urbane but not cynical dialogue, the keenly drawn portraits of the characters, the simple pleasure of spending time with Kate Fansler again.

Finally, and not a moment too soon, Lucille Kallen has given us a new novel. This one is **C.B. Greenfield: A Little Madness** (Ran-

dom House, \$14.95, 181 pp.), and we welcome back our old friends C.B. and Maggie Rome. If you've not been introduced to them yet, here's your chance to meet the irascible-but lovable C.B., a man who could be typecast to play the title role in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. Retired from a New York newspaper, Greenfield owns a small weekly Long Island paper which he runs with a small but loyal staff. Maggie Rome, middle-aged and married, is his star-reporter, his "whipping boy," and his most loyal friend. This latest adventure begins with an episode that offers new insight into the Maggie-Greenfield relationship: Greenfield's obvious attraction to a beautiful and talented British violinist (both Greenfield and Maggie are amateur musicians, and play together in a chamber group) unexpectedly annoys Maggie no end. She won't admit to being jealous; instead, she impetuously announces that she's taking her vacation and joining an upstate-New York women's protest against a nuclear military installation. Unfortunately, that was also the reason the beautiful Brit was in the area at all, so Maggie's big getaway doesn't really get her away from the problem. And as so often happens around Maggie, there's soon big trouble at the peace camp. The solution to the murder takes a back seat to the Maggie-Greenfield drama—but then, it always does. The verbal sparring between these two is no small part of the charm of the series, and this latest won't disappoint fans of the duo.

The Ritual Bath by Faye Kellerman is a fascinating look into a culture that, for many of us, is totally foreign. The crime is, at first, all too common: a woman is violently raped in her neighborhood. It is her neighborhood that is different, for the woman was attacked on the grounds of a Jewish yeshiva in the hills near Los Angeles on her way home from the mikvah (the ritual bathhouse). The yeshiva is a school for training rabbinical students, Jewish religious scholars. And so the yeshiva is mostly composed of men, the students, but it also includes wives and families and teachers, even two lay teachers who live "off-campus" but who teach with Rina, the widow of a scholar. The rabbi has allowed Rina to remain in the enclave, to work as the "mikvah lady" and as teacher to earn her place in the community, and to provide for herself and her two young boys. For LAPD detective Peter Decker, the case seems insoluble. The yeshiva isn't secure from outsiders, and the victim (because of religious taboos) won't cooperate. It is Rina who agrees to talk to the victim and then the detective, and the two strike up a friendship. This mystery has danger and suspense and a solid crime plot; but it is most compelling for its characterizations,

and for its detailed portrait of a very conservative, isolated, and pious Jewish sect. It's a wonderful combination. (Arbor House, \$15.95, 283 pp.)

Author Liza Cody has received favorable attention in Britain, where her Anna Lee novels were first published. **Stalker** is the latest (Warner, \$3.50, 201 pp.), and it's solid work. Anna Lee is young but professional, an investigator with a large London firm. She is tough about situations that imperil her, easy (too easy, she thinks) on the down-and-outers—and maybe too easy on her rare lovers. A client sends her off to locate a man, allegedly because of a bad debt owed to the client; but the man's wife acts oddly, and there are two gents around the woman who seem eager to scare Anna off the man's trail. To complicate matters, she falls hard for an attractive tycoon, and then is called off the case abruptly by her boss. But although her personal life takes a blow, she can't let go of the case, tenaciously seeking out the truth—and a surprising truth it is. Anna Lee is up-to-date, unsentimental, and honest, and I suspect fans of P.D. James's female detective will also appreciate Liza Cody's.

Monsieur Pamplemousse made his debut as an amateur detective in Michael Bond's book, titled after the main character himself. Now we have another adventure, **Monsieur Pamplemousse and the Secret Mission** (Beaufort Books, \$13.95, 208 pp.). Bond is the creator of Paddington Bear, and he has certainly imbued these adult mysteries with the same sense of whimsy and nonsensical adventure that mark his children's tales. Pamplemousse—whose trusty sidekick, by the way, is a large dog called Pommes Frites—is retired Surêté, now a food critic for the foremost French food guide and magazine. He is sent on a "secret mission" by his boss, who hopes that Pamplemousse can covertly check out a rural hotel/restaurant run by a relative, a business that is failing sadly. I am grossly oversimplifying here, for in truth the plot elements also include a buxom British maid who cooks like an angel, a shifty baker, an old crone, another food critic involved in a scandalous sex trial (his own, at that!)—and a portable toilet in the town square that is itself shrouded in mystery. Get the picture? Michael Bond has devised a zany world full of caprice, sometimes even the bizarre. If one has the patience for all of this, he will be rewarded with scenes that are hilarious. Though not for everyone's taste, Monsieur Pamplemousse has, even after two books, begun to earn a place in the hearts of many mystery readers. He doesn't take himself too seriously, nor should readers.

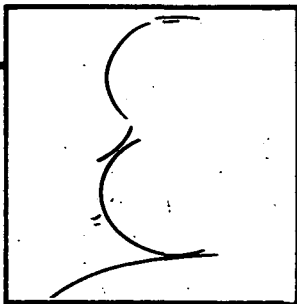


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Robert Redford in *Legal Eagles*.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



The critical and popular success of **Legal Eagles** will come as no surprise to mystery fans, who will easily recognize in this romantic comedy some of the most attractive features of good mystery. Robert Redford and Debra Winger start out as antagonists. He is a smooth, successful assistant district attorney, she a tenacious defense lawyer making a pest of herself on behalf of obviously guilty clients.

After battling through the early legal rounds over a young woman's apparent theft of a painting, Redford is set up by the unknown villains who lie behind the young woman's growing troubles, which include a murder rap in which the circumstantial evidence is

overwhelmingly against her. As a result, Redford loses his job and joins Winger on the defense side. As if this weren't enough to convince the experienced mystery buff of the young woman's innocence, she is played by the lissome blonde Darryl Hannah (the mermaid in *Splash*), is a liar, a seductress, and an eccentric, avant-garde "performance" artist. The audience knows that one part of her story is substantially accurate: she has not really stolen but only repossessed the painting, which was done by her famous father. He had dedicated it to her just before his death in a fire that supposedly destroyed millions of dollars' worth of his work. Redford and Winger begin to real-

ize that someone collected on a trumped-up insurance claim for the paintings, which probably still exist. The same someone wants to make a second fortune on the paintings, and is obviously the person who has framed their client for murder, taken a shot at Redford, and tried to run down the Redford-Winger team in the street.

The two lawyers' sleuthing ranges through the art world from Darryl Hannah's trendy loft in a rundown part of SoHo to Sotheby's auction galleries and the posh Madison Avenue gallery of Victor Taft, played as a maddeningly supercilious villain by British actor Terence Stamp. Actual modern masterpieces hang on the walls of the gallery (some twelve million dollars' worth, the producers report), and the plot turns on knowledge about modern art styles and their monetary values. For an upwardly mobile lawyer, Redford knows astonishingly little about these matters. But the script calls for him to seem like an ordinary guy instead of a big star: he is also shown locking his keys in his car, dropping groceries, and suffering from insomnia. The

characterization recalls Cary Grant's comic ineptitudes in romantic comedies like *Bringing Up Baby* and *His Girl Friday*, and Alfred Hitchcock's exploitation of Grant's charm in *To Catch a Thief* and three other movies. Redford's laid-back underplaying, though, limits him to being a very pleasant actor, in contrast to the frenetic, hilarious Grant.

This is not to say that the formulas of romantic comedy and suspense fail to work in *Legal Eagles*. Redford gets to make the opening speech for the defense in Darryl Hannah's murder trial, and to chase the mysterious assassin who has been stalking him. Winger, billed as a non-driver, gets to drive his car in a chase scene. And together the two lawyers get to escape from a spectacular warehouse explosion on the Brooklyn waterfront. The art gallery fire at the end is the fourth conflagration in the movie, and that makes one too many. But like the chases, the detection, the comedy, and the dialogue, the fires are done with professional skill.

And, oh | yes, the two stars do fall in love.

THE STORY THAT WON



Photograph © 1932 by Andre Kertesz

The June Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Frank Peirce of College Station, Texas. Honorable mentions go to William F. Smith of Garden Grove, California; Don Shaffer of San Mateo, California; Willie Rose of Antioch, California; L. H. Pyle of Rensselaer, New York; Judy C. Sayles of Chicago, Illinois; Patricia Loges of Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Alice Hollister of Des Moines, Iowa; John Dalbec of Youngstown, Ohio; and M. C. Dahlin of Schaumburg, Illinois.

THE DEVIL INCARNATE by Frank Peirce

When I approached the great Spanish church, I was surprised to discover men seated or standing shoulder-to-shoulder around it. They blocked entrance to the church on all sides.

They were dressed in tight-fitting black suits and wore black hats with flat brims and low crowns in the Spanish fashion. All had black hair and eyes, and their countenances were as black as their attire.

An obvious tourist in my brightly-colored sports clothes, a camera slung from my neck, I must have presented a strange contrast to them with my blond hair and blue eyes.

Naturally I could not resist taking their picture.

Once I had, I approached and asked the men what was taking place.

"We are guarding the church against the Devil, señor," one of the men answered. "While we are here, he will never be able to enter."

I clapped my hands silently, applauding them.

"What does the Devil look like?" I asked. "How will you recognize him? Surely he will not appear all in red with horns and a pointed tail."

Despite their black mood, the men smiled. Each had a different description of the Devil, a different means of recognizing him. Fortunately, I resembled none of their descriptions. Otherwise, I fear what they might have done to me.

"May I enter?" I asked the men guarding the church entrance.

"Certainly, señor," one of them answered, stepping aside.

"Thank you," I said, "I wish to prey."

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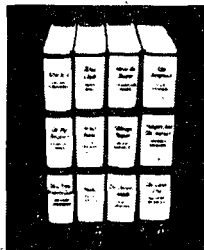
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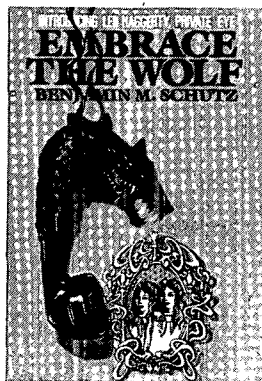
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